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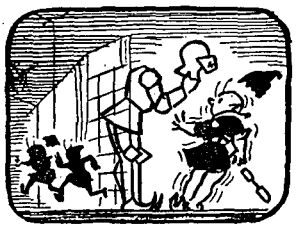

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ARGOSY

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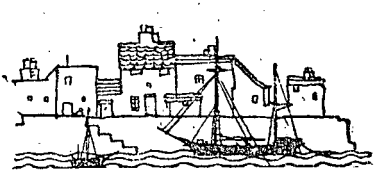
Sea-Drinking Cities

SEA-DRINKING cities have a moon-struck air;
Houses are topped with look-outs; dormers stare
At stranger-vessels and swart cunning faces.
They are touched with long sleeping in the sea-born moon;
They have heard fabled sails slatting in the dark,
Clearing with no papers, unwritten in any log,
Light as thin leaves before the rough typhoon;
Keels trace a phosphor-mark,
To follow to old ocean-drowned green places.

They never lose longing for the never-known,
These ocean-townships moored and hawsered fast,
They welcome ships, salt-jewelled venturers
That up over the curve of the world are blown
With sun-rise in their sails and gold-topped mast;
And in the evening they let them go again
Into the cavernous fog that folds and stirs.

Their loveliness, as of an old tale told . . .
A harbour-goblet, with wide-brimming lip
Where morning tumbles in shaken red and gold,
Trinketed and sun-bedizened, they sip;
But all bewitched, old cities sit at gaze
Toward the wharves of Mogador . . . Gibraltar,
Where the shawl-selling Arab piles a blaze
Of fiery birds and flowers on Trade's heaped altar.
Sea-drunken sure are these,—
Towns that doze—dream—and never wake at all,
While the soft supple wind slides through the trees,
And the sun sleeps against the yellow wall.

JOSEPHINE PINCKNEY



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THE FIVE EGGS

"Back to my mother I go in a minute," shouted Mair

by HYWEL DAVIES

WHEN the chapel wedding was over in the valley, old William called at his mother-in-law's bit of a farm to collect the cow which she was giving away with the bride. He harnessed Shoni the horse in the cart, gave a leg up to his wife, who sat stiff as a ramrod on the plank seat, and tied the end of the halter round the cow's neck to the back of the cart. Then he cried "Gee up, Shoni," and they set off for home. Old William walked behind, for the horse knew the way up the steep road to the top of the Yellow Mountain as well as he any day.

Old William walked behind, he did, putting a horny forefinger now and again below the ring of grey beard which stretched from ear to ear and giving a tug at his tight collar. Ay, there was the cow, splaying her legs before him as she walked, and there was his virgin bride of forty-five, her black back humping below the ring of blowing pansies in her hat, and there was Shoni, snoring and roaring in his windpipe as he tugged up the road cut deep between the hedges.

He stretched out a hand and pinched the cow's rump.

"It's a bit old the cow is, Mair," he called out.

"It's a bit old we are all getting, William bach," she cried back, but not turning her head.

"That is truth," William agreed, but he had a bad feeling that his mother-in-law had cheated him.

It was a fine spring morning, with a small wind moving in the hedges. The cocks were crowing in the valley.

Towards the top of the hill they went past the farmhouse of Gellywern. Dan saw the pansies bobbing above the hedge and fired a gun into the air. Bang, went the gun, and the birds stopped singing.

"A good wedding to you," shouted Dan at the gate as they went past, his red face laughing at them.

William waved his whip towards him.

Soon they were out on the flat bleak heather-land at the top of the Yellow Mountain, where the bogs are and the water is rusted with red. On a rise away to the right William pointed out his little house,

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the windows as small and shut-looking as a man's eyes when the sun is in them.

"There is a great need for something to eat on me," shouted Mair. "I hope there is the filling of a belly at your house, husband."

"I have a hole to be filled too," said William. "There is bread and butter and five eggs."

"Three to me and two to you," said Mair.

"Am I not the man?" asked William.

The cart creaked to a stop in the yard. William unharnessed Shoni and turned him and the cow loose into the field. Mair ran indoors, stepped out of her black skirt and tied an apron over her red flannel petticoat. She hung up her hat on a peg behind the door and soon had the table laid and the eggs on the boil.

"Busy like a good wife you are," said William, undoing the stiff collar round his neck.

"Near ready are the eggs," said Mair. "Three to me and two to you."

"What's got into the woman?" cried William. "Sure it is two to you and three to me."

A look of thunder came into her face.

"Said I not three to me?" she shouted.

"Saying is not doing, wife. Are they not the layings of my own hens, and gathered fresh this morning with my hands?"

"This is why you have called me from my mother?" she cried.

Out the eggs came from the saucepan, huddling white and close together on the wood of the table. William picked them up with his large hands and put them all five in his pocket.

"Advice must we have," he said, and went out through the door. In the yard he put his fingers to his mouth and shrilled three whistles.

"Dan will be with us in a little minute now," he said when he got back to the kitchen. "Wife, get you the bread and butter cut."

"Is it me you are ordering about?"

"A word in the ear is better than a clout," said William.

But there she sat, with a brow like a ploughed field. William cut himself a slice of bread the thickness of a hand, buttered it, and started eating. In a while she did likewise.

"Little wife of my bosom," he cajoled, "a sad thing it is to start our two lives together in this wise."

"Och, so it is," she agreed.

"In this question of the eggs now, it is reason which should reign."

"It is truth you speak there, husband."

"So let it be," said William, passing over two eggs to Mair and keeping three for himself.

"Where is my other egg, the little husband?"

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" Why, three for me and two for you," said William, exasperated.

" Agree with that I never will," shrilled Mair.

But there was Dan the farmer, with his red face. He saw how it was in the twinkle of an eyelid. What a story to tell homing from chapel, or at the Eisteddfod ! Yes, sure, a rich man of words would he be the rest of his days, with plenty of men listening. Over his tongue it would come like a never-stopping waterfall.

" Woe is me, you see how it is, old neighbour," said William.

Dan sat on the skew and spat into the fire.

" It's justice I do want," cried Mair, " three eggs to me and two to him."

" Depends it does," said Dan judiciously, " on who is top dog in this marriage."

Mair and William hung their heads, not looking at each other. Hadn't they known from the beginning it was that, a fight to be top dog. And here was this gross fool of a red-faced jackass saying it out loud.

" A dull-headed fellow you are, Dan," said Mair sharply.

" From a religious point of view now," Dan went on happily, " there is that bit about for better or for worse, until death do you part."

" His side you are taking then ? " said Mair with a high voice. " It is not death that do be parting us, but eggs."

" A shameful thing indeed it is to quarrel before neighbours," said William, combing his beard with his fingers. " Little wife, now, come you over here and we will talk."

Dan watched them with crafty eyes. Not a bit of this salty story must he miss. Saying tidy, consoling things old William was by the dresser, and soothing down was that hag, Mair. But not a word could he hear. Pity indeed to be peacemaking, without a smart smack of a tail to the story.

" Ay then, Mair dear," William was saying out loud. " Reasonable you are, so let us to the food. Three eggs for me."

There was the fat in the fire again and words being thrown like stones.

" Back to my mother I go in a minute," shouted Mair. " Go you now at once and put your wheezy Shoni in the shafts, and do you be tying my cow behind quickly."

And by God, there was old William going out, too, and catching the horse, and putting harness on him, and stepping him back into the shafts, and now he was calling the cow, " Trwydi fach, Trwydi fach," and putting a halter round her neck and tying the end of it to the back of the cart. Was justice to be done ever to a story like this !

Ay, Lord help us, Old William was sitting down side by side with

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Mair and crying " Gee up " to the horse, and Shoni legging it out smartly.

Dan took to the road in pursuit. It was not a thing to be missed.

Down in the valley again William spoke his mind.

" Shameful it is, leaving me the day of your wedding, Mair fach. Great will be your shame, and lonely indeed will I be on the Yellow Mountain. Little wife, not good is it for man to live alone. A despised virgin you will be until you are under the earth."

" That is my thought too," said Mair gently.

Coming round a corner of the road, the sweat dripping from his nose, Dan saw them turning back, and stopped like a shot rabbit. " Is it settled then ? " he shouted, showing his disappointment.

" Yes, indeed," said Mair ; " three eggs to me and two to him."

" The devil to you, woman," cried William. " Round with you, Shoni horse, to her mother with her."

William did not open his mouth again until they came to her mother's house, though Mair was sniffling in her nose. " Down you get, virgin," he shouted. " Put your old feet to earth."

But Mair did not move.

" Heard you not me, wife ? "

But not a word in answer. It was all a silence, Shoni hanging his head down, the cow without a whisk in her tail, Mair sitting like a stone, William looking up, and Dan not breathing at all.

" Turn you the horse round and go home," said Mair meekly.

" It is three eggs to me then ? " William asked.

Mair put her skirt up to her eyes and started crying. She wept a long time with a loud noise.

" It is three to me ? " William asked again.

" Eat you all bloody five," she whimpered at last.

* * *

THE OBSERVER

A scientist, observing the habits of a small monkey, tried to make the monkey play with a bat and ball. The monkey obstinately refused.

So the scientist decided to leave the monkey alone in the room with the bat and ball. He closed the door and waited a moment. Then, very quietly, he stooped and peered into the room through the keyhole.

He found himself staring into an intent brown eye.

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MR. ALBERT FINKLEMAN

"I am quite sane," he said. "Perhaps the sanest man alive"

by NEIL BELL

MY name is Gordon Manners. I am forty-six years of age and for the past two years have been City Editor of *The Daily Cable*. Finance is both my profession and my hobby. Mathematics since my earliest childhood has fascinated and enthralled me. If I were asked what I considered the most engrossing, the most absorbing thing in life I should reply, "facts about figures." Flights of the imagination do not appeal to me. I consider them childish, absurd, and beneath the notice of a mature mind.

I tell you this about myself lest you think I invented the story of Albert Finkleman. I did not; first, because I could not; I haven't the gift, if gift it is and not a disability. And second, because, even if I could, I should not dream of wasting my time in so infantile a fashion. I can vouch for the truth of what share I had in Finkleman's odd story; and it is reasonable therefore to suppose that if my part in the affair is factual, as I insist it is, then what Finkleman related to me is also factual.

I usually leave my Fleet Street office shortly after five o'clock; but now and again something crops up which detains me until as late as seven. On these occasions I ring my wife and tell her I shall dine at my Club. We live at Hampstead and in the ordinary way I catch a train which enables me to be home before six.

It was one of my late evenings and darkness had fallen as I came out into the bustling noisy street and set off towards Piccadilly hoping to find a taxi before I had gone far. As I stepped off the pavement to cross the road I kicked some small plump object. That I thought it was a well-filled tobacco pouch was doubtless due to my being a heavy smoker and never completely happy without the feel of a fat tobacco pouch in my pocket. It was not a pouch but a wallet and, to the feel, crammed to bursting point.

I found a taxi almost immediately and as we wound our way towards my Club I examined my find. It contained one hundred new five-pound notes and one hundred new pound notes. The thought came into my mind that it was the property of a counterfeiter setting out upon his rounds. And then I noticed a visiting

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card: not the sort of thing a forger would be likely to keep with his productions. It bore the name Mr. Albert Finkleman; the address, 5a Queen Anne Mansions, Mayfair; and the telephone number.

I had a leisurely and very pleasant little dinner and having smoked a couple of pipes with my coffee, I asked a page to get me the Mayfair number; and a few moments later went to the telephone. Yes, an agreeably modulated voice said, it was Mr. Albert Finkleman speaking and what could he do for me? I explained about the wallet and said I would have it sent round to him by special messenger or leave it at my Club for him to call for. But he begged me, and there was excitement in his voice, to bring it to him myself as he wished to thank me personally. I could hardly refuse and I told him I would call in on him for a few moments on my way to the station. I thought it best so to make it plain that the interview must be of the briefest.

5a Queen Anne Mansions was a small service flat. Mr. Finkleman received me himself and gently brushing aside my protest that I could not linger, led the way into a cosily furnished room whose contents obviously belonged to a man of some culture who was by no means indifferent to creature comforts.

I refused a whisky but accepted a black coffee, which he poured me from a large percolator standing on an occasional table near his chair. He refilled his own cup and taking out his pipe offered me his pouch. "Of course you smoke," he said; "all men who appreciate the best in life do. And I know you smoke a pipe from your fingers."

I looked at him closely now for the first time. He was a man of medium height and build; clean shaven and with a fresh complexion; his hair was thick and slightly greying and I guessed him a well-preserved fifty-five. All that about him was quite normal, almost commonplace. But his eyes were not at all ordinary. It was not their size or shape or colour (grey), which could have been matched a dozen times in a five minutes stroll along Fleet Street. It was their expression, which was at once contemplative, amused, tolerant, compassionate. It was as if he were looking at life and the human race and its antics with an insight and a knowledge denied to other men and that he found the spectacle an amusing one of which he never tired.

And then I noticed that he was smiling. "Is the verdict a favourable one?" he said; and without waiting for me to answer he went on, "I should like to tell you a story, may I?"

I felt a mild chill of disappointment. Was that all he was? An elderly bore eager to pour out to any stranger some dull personal reminiscence? "I am sorry," I said; "I have a train to catch.

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I really must go."

"Is there no later train?"

"My wife is expecting me."

"My telephone is at your service."

His persistence began to irritate me. "I am afraid not," I said; "I do not wish to be late. My wife is rather nervous; she is under some strain at the moment." And I rose to go.

He put out a restraining hand. "One moment, please," he said. I sat down again, annoyed with him; more annoyed with myself for my acquiescence.

He tapped the wallet. "That was not the first," he said. "It was the fourth I have dropped. But yours was the first to be returned. Does that whet your curiosity?"

I made a little gesture with my hands. "I simply can't stay," I said.

"How old do you think I am?"

The question, so apparently irrelevant, startled me. I felt a doubt of his sanity creeping into my thoughts. "I am not good at ages," I said shortly; "in the fifties I imagine."

"I am a hundred and twenty." He smiled at my expression. "It is quite true," he said; "and I am quite sane. Perhaps the sanest man alive. May I tell you the story?"

But I was determined to go, and seeing this in my face he said, "Look here, will you dine with me tomorrow?" And as I hesitated he went on eagerly, "You will not regret it, I assure you. Much depends on it. Come now, my dear sir, oblige me."

It was impossible to refuse and at least it enabled me to take my leave: and if on the morrow I changed my mind I could ring him up.

He was profuse, almost overwhelming, in his thanks; and as he showed me out he said, "I dine at seven-thirty, but do come along at seven. I've a Montilla I'd like to discuss with you. Wine is one of the three supreme pleasures of life for which a wise man never loses his zest."

I turned at the door. "And the other two?" I said.

He gave me his strange probing smile. "I would put tobacco in the place of song," he said; "and the third must remain as the tag has it. For the order: to each man his choice."

I am fond of good living and reckon to do myself pretty well but I have never eaten a better dinner than Mr. Finkleman gave me the next evening, and few as good. When we had finished and were smoking over our coffee he said, "First, for my story; and afterwards, if you are interested, we'll come to my purpose in telling you. But before I begin I do most earnestly beg of you to clear your mind of any suspicion that I am trying to foist upon you a fantastic

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tale; or that I am mad.

"I was born exactly one hundred and twenty years ago and was already a schoolboy when Queen Victoria ascended the throne. I will not bore you with the trivial details of what was for sixty years a very ordinary and commonplace life. I married when I was forty. I was already a director of the firm of accountants where I had worked since I came down from Cambridge without a degree at the age of twenty-two. I married a woman who had no looks apart from an agreeable figure but, more to my taste, she was very affectionate. When I add that she was intelligent, well-bred, and well-educated, you will expect that my marriage was a happy one.

"It was indeed. That it was childless gave me no concern, for I am not fond of children and have not the common itch to perpetuate myself through descendants. It was however a grief to my wife and she would have adopted one or more children but for my warmly expressed aversion to the notion. Had a child I had fathered shown himself in later life a scamp I should have borne the burden philosophically: but not at the hands of another's brat.

"We were very comfortably off and we often spent as much as two months of the year in Continental travel, during which time, as well as when I was at home, I assiduously pursued my hobby, which was book-collecting. It was perhaps book collecting of an unusual sort, for I did not collect books for their contents, or because they were first editions, but for their bindings. During the sixteenth century in England and the early seventeenth in France, and to some extent in Italy, many beautifully bound books were issued from both public and private presses; and of these there were quite a number in tooled leather which have never been equalled for craftsmanship. It was the beautiful and not the curious I was after: a book bound in the skin of a flayed poisoner had no attraction for me; I would not have given a penny for it.

"Although I considered myself a well-read man, and today am certainly better read than most men now living, I did not invariably read the contents of my purchases and one, a lovely piece of English binding done in or about the year 1519, I did not look into for some years after it became mine. I did not even know its title for there was no lettering on the binding, a not uncommon feature in the binding of incunabula. When I did so I found its title was *A Witches Brewe*, and its sub-title *A Cauldron of Magick both Blacke and Whyte done into Englishe from the Latine of Michael Scott.*

"No man could be less interested in magic than I was. I did not believe in its existence and I should have declared emphatically, had I been asked, that people who gave credence to such rubbish were half-witted. That I should begin to read a book upon such a subject still surprises me when I think about it; but that I should have

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continued for more than a few pages in quite inexplicable. There were recipes for every desire great or trivial of the human heart: from implanting passion in an indifferent breast to restoring youth.

" I was sixty when I read that book and it might well be thought that at sixty I should have felt some faint stir of interest when I turned over one of the yellow and brittle pages and read: *Infallible formula for the restoration of Youthe as practised for centuries by the Priests of Ra and the Priestesses of Isis.* I felt no such stir and turned over quickly; too quickly, for the brittle paper broke and half the page came away between my finger and thumb. It was that portion of the page on which was the ' infallible formula.'

" Why I did not throw the piece into the waste paper basket I do not know for I certainly had no intention of trying any restoration of the page. Perhaps my thoughts were elsewhere, for I sat quite a while with the piece of paper between my finger and thumb. Presently, almost as if unaware of what I was doing, I read the words printed on that piece of page in thick black clumsy letters which bore no likeness at all to those of the lovely types then being cut and cast in England and parts of the Continent.

" What was the formula ? I knew it by heart. But I shall not tell you what it was. That makes you smile. You think it comes strangely from a man who has stigmatized magic as rubbish fit only for half-wits. But that is not my opinion now. It was my opinion before—but let us have some more coffee. For myself, I should very much like another brandy; but only if you will humour my weakness by joining me. That is charming of you. And now for a happening that will strain your credulity but which I beg you to believe.

" I had the formula made up. It took me some time, for not a few of the dozen ingredients had to be sent for abroad and it was nearly six months before I had everything ready and following the not too clear instructions, brewed (for it took nearly twenty hours) a trifle over twelve fluid ounces of a cloudy, musty-smelling, yellow liquid which after standing for the requisite day and night became bright amber in colour with a faint subtly attractive fragrance and with a pleasantly pungent taste.

" And there I might well have ended the matter by throwing the stuff away. I did no such thing. Having gone to infinite trouble making it, I determined to drink it. It needed no little courage; how much you would realise if I told you the ingredients.

" I decided to drink it the last thing at night so as to give it ample time to work. The recipe, I should tell you, contained no instructions as to how much should be taken or when. I have never been a man of half-measures and so just before I went to bed one baking hot August night I drank off the whole of the twelve ounces.

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I had debated with myself for some time whether or not to tell my wife and had decided I would keep it to myself. That was a mistake I was bitterly to regret for many years.

"The draught had a pleasant if slightly acrid taste and was rather hot in the throat and on the stomach; but that quickly passed off and I felt no more of it. It must have had some soporific quality for while my wife tossed and turned sleeplessly in our bed I slept like the proverbial top and woke in the morning feeling refreshed and very well; but certainly not rejuvenated, for my shaving glass showed me the same reflection as it had done for some years and as I lathered my face I smiled at myself and wondered how on earth I could have been such a credulous donkey as to believe for one moment in that medieval nonsense.

"It was so hot that just before setting off for the station I decided to wear my grey alpaca jacket and a Panama instead of my more formal attire and in my hurry I omitted to remove my card case from my other jacket.

"It was my habit to take a hansom from the station to my office; but that morning I thought I would walk through the Park as the shade of the trees looked so inviting. After emerging from the Park I had roughly about a quarter mile to walk and it was then the accident happened. I was crossing the street and feeling suddenly giddy I stopped, swayed, and almost fell: and before I could recover myself I was knocked down and rendered unconscious by a recklessly driven tradesman's cart.

"I can give you only a second-hand version of what happened next, for I knew nothing of it myself. I was taken to St. George's hospital, still unconscious, and there put to bed. Without my cards and with no correspondence upon me, the hospital authorities could not identify me; but they did inform the police that I was being kept in hospital.

"I was still unconscious at the end of the day but was again examined by one of the house surgeons who expressed the opinion that I had suffered no severe injury and that my continued unconsciousness was caused by shock.

"At three o'clock the following morning the night nurse, making one of her rounds, was startled by a stifled cry as she approached my bed. She hurried up, held the lamp high, and stared down at the bed in bewildered consternation. There was nothing there but a small violently struggling body under the clothes and it was obviously from this body that had proceeded the stifled cry which had so startled her.

"She hurriedly drew down the clothes and discovered a boy baby that to her practised eye looked no more than a few hours old. Of the unconscious body of the elderly man she had looked at on her

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previous round there was no sign. Naturally there was not, for the boy baby was the elderly man completely rejuvenated.

"I want to leave something to your imagination and so I will not unduly dilate upon the events of the next few days; but you will easily be able to provide for yourself a picture of the comings and goings of officials and police officers and detectives. The newspapers made the most of it and for some days it was a sensation. But no one engaged in the search for the missing Mr. Albert Finkleman of Ellis, Shaw & Finkleman, or in the various enquiries as to how a newly born infant came to be in his bed in the men's ward, suggested that intruding babe and missing elderly gentleman were one and the same person. It never entered anyone's head. How could it? Ask yourself if it could have entered yours.

"The inexplicable business would, it was generally agreed, have been simplified if Mr. Finkleman's clothes had disappeared with him and if a babe had been missing from the Maternity Ward at the other end of the corridor. But no babe was missing and there were Mr. Finkleman's clothes laid out in the matron's room for all to see.

"The nine days' wonder, as all wonders do, gave place in the public interest to some other sensational happening. But to those chiefly concerned the wonder and the bewilderment, the terror and the distress, remained; as they always do. But despite all her bewilderment and distress my wife showed herself a woman of sense and decision. She offered a reward of five thousand pounds for any information leading to my discovery, dead or alive. And she adopted the baby and had him christened Albert, after me.

"And now I feel that you are itching to put a question to me. And rightly so. And that question, I have no doubt, is: was the baby aware of its identity with the vanished Mr. Finkleman? The answer is an emphatic and unqualified No.

"It was, in truth, not until little Albert Finkleman had achieved puberty and was, to be precise, exactly fourteen and half years of age, that the memory of his former life began to come back to him. It returned at first in odd little gleams and flashes; in sudden vivid pictures that came and went in an instant; in visions of unknown places and unknown people; and in fragments of speech spoken by unfamiliar voices. But the process of the revived memory, once begun, grew rapidly more comprehensive and detailed, until, by the time I was sixteen, I was in the most complete possession of all the events of my former life.

"My wife (I of course called her 'Mother') had not married again and had long since been given leave by the Courts to presume her husband's death and to claim the money due on his life insurance.

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Fortunately I had been a prudent man and the insurance amounted to ten thousand pounds; and this, with my savings and investments, enabled us to live very comfortably and for me to receive the best education that money could buy. With the full return of my memory I was at times, I must admit, unable to contemplate my 'Mother's' placid, passionless face without a sense of embarrassment and almost incredulity as I remembered the early days and nights of our marriage: a situation piquant and perhaps unique.

"My 'Mother' died when I was forty, leaving me sufficient to live on in moderate comfort. I had not married and you will, I am sure, appreciate my reasons. And I have remained a bachelor to this day. I do not mean a celibate. I am too grateful for life's supreme gift to be guilty of that folly. I have had many love passages with women and I remember them all with delight.

"With the return of my memory of my former life there came back also my knowledge and experience, so that by the time I was forty I had at my command to all intents and purposes, the knowledge and experience of a centenarian; while possessing the mind and body of a man in the prime of life. It was this experience and knowledge that enabled me by shrewd investments to increase the small sum my 'Mother' left me until by the time I was fifty I was worth nearly a quarter of a million pounds. I am today worth slightly more than that very cosy amount.

"And now, my dear sir, I come to the object of my invitation to you to dine with me. Let me be as brief as possible. I put the age of sixty as the utmost limit for a man's full enjoyment of life: few indeed reach that age without a lamentable decrease in the power to enjoy the sweets. After sixty that power wanes with ever increasing speed until long before the eighties are reached, the power has vanished altogether. But not the desire. There's the rub. The desire is as keen, as haunting, as besetting, as ever; but it is a desire utterly frustrated in the present and with nothing to hope for in the future: a true death in life.

"And so some months ago I decided once more to seek rejuvenation and I set about gathering the ingredients for the life giving draught. It is now brewed and ready. But the great drawback to my first rejuvenation was that I had made no monetary disposition for my future and so had to be dependent upon others for my means of support; and my new life was, in fact, considerably restricted in enjoyment by the comparatively meagre sum my 'Mother' left me.

"I did not intend to make the same mistake again. I meant to have a most ample fortune at my command as soon as I was able to enjoy its use. But there were difficulties which will, I am sure, be

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clear to you. And the only really safe way out of them was, I concluded after long cogitation, to find an honest man and leave my fortune with him in trust for Albert Finkleman the Third when that fortunate (and surely unique) young man should come of age (also for the third time). Hence that little subterfuge of the wallets and your arrival at my door last night."

"Are you not rather taking too much for granted, Mr. Finkleman?" I asked.

He gave me his so comprehending smile. "That you may be honest about six hundred pounds," he said; "but be unable to resist the temptation of a quarter of a million: that is what you mean?" I nodded and he went on, "There is some force in that but it is based upon the illusion that every man has his price. There are, and always have been, many, very many, men and women whose word or act or silence no money could buy. They are incorruptible. They are the salt of the earth. And you, Mr. Manners, are one of that fine company.

"How do I know? I am a hundred and twenty years old and have a greater experience of life and of men and women than any other living person. That experience teaches me how to read men and women, and my reading of you is that your honour cannot be bought. And so I have chosen you. I put my life in your hands. One moment: I have not quite finished: Have you any children?"

It was my turn to smile. "I cannot but think, Mr. Finkleman," I said, "that there is more than chance in our encounter, presumptuous and egoistical as the thought may be."

"Why do you say that?"

"Simply that my wife is expecting our first child within a week or ten days."

"That is marvellous," he said. "It is the coping stone; the crown of the arch. The two children shall be brought up together as brothers, or brother and sister. They shall . . ."

I put up my hand. "You are running rather a long way ahead, Mr. Finkleman," I said.

"Forgive me for taking it all for granted. It has been thus taken in my thoughts and so," with a faint shrug, "I had begun to look upon it as an agreed thing. You will want more details. Do forgive my preoccupation with myself. At my age, I should have learned better. I fear it is a preoccupation from which we never escape, even if we live to a thousand, as I hope to do. This is my project and I beg you to accept the part I have planned for you.

"I want you to take me to your house as a guest, revealing to your wife everything I have told you. I suggest you tell her everything or you may have some difficult, delicate, and invidious explanations on your hands. On my first night with you I shall

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drink the rejuvenating brew and some time during the next forty-eight hours I shall, I have no doubt, be transformed again, as once before, into a newly-born baby boy.

"That boy you will bring up and educate; for which purpose you will be provided with ample funds and also with a personal gift from me of the not unhandsome sum of twenty-five thousand pounds. You will invest for me, so that I may inherit it at the age of twenty-one, the residue of my fortune, a sum slightly under two hundred thousand pounds. I suggest that if your baby is a boy the two should be treated as twins and educated together.

"No! please do not answer now. Think it over with great care; discuss it, if you wish, with your wife; and in the morning ring me up and say, in one word, either yes or no. If it is yes I will complete all the necessary financial arrangements. I can do this in an hour or so for all preliminaries have long been completed. I suggest that you should then call for me tomorrow evening and that I return with you to your house at Hampstead, and as soon as I have retired to my bedroom I will swallow the magic draught which is, I may tell you, exactly the same in colour, brightness and odour as the former one: and doubtless its taste will also be the same."

When I reached home that night my wife was not asleep, having designedly kept herself awake with a book in order to hear my news. I had decided to confide in her (for no other plan seemed feasible) and told her the whole fantastic story, quite expecting her to explode it with her feminine commonsense. To my astonishment she believed it and was moreover delighted. While I ascribed this unexpected credulity to the peculiar psychological condition associated with pregnancy, and about which male doctors write so omnisciently, I was both pleased and relieved, for I had already determined that my answer to Mr. Finkleman should be Yes; and it would obviously simplify matters to have my wife as an eager and enthusiastic associate rather than a derisive antagonist.

"Why, darling," she said, "nothing could be more delightful. The little Finkleman will be a companion for our little Davie" (for her feminine intuition had revealed to her that her babe was a boy and we had chosen his name) "and the money will make just that very difference that money does make."

And so the following day Mr. Albert Finkleman came home with me in time for dinner. My wife was agreeably taken by him and whispered to me over our coffee what a charming man he was and what a sweet baby she was sure he would make. And shortly after ten o'clock Mr. Finkleman bade us goodnight and went to his room.

As he turned to leave us my wife said, "I wish you a very happy childhood, Mr. Finkleman." And giving her his all-comprehending

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smile he replied, " Dear Lady, I could be in no kinder hands."

I had decided not to go to the office the next day, but did not expect anything to happen much before the early afternoon; and indeed it was nearly four o'clock when the change took place and my wife and I, going up to Mr. Finkleman's room, found in the bed the awaited baby boy.

Most newly born infants are disappointingly unprepossessing but little Albert was as pretty a babe as I have seen and we were both delighted with him. Our one anxiety now was that David's arrival would be delayed, for we had planned to register the two as twins, if that were at all possible. The only problem then remaining would be to persuade the midwife and our doctor to maintain a discreet silence in the matter; and I did not anticipate any great difficulty in achieving this. Nor, I may as well say at once, did I encounter any difficulty that I was not able to overcome; but in the interests of professional etiquette the details may be left to the imagination.

David was born exactly eighteen hours after the rejuvenation of Mr. Finkleman and by a quite astonishing coincidence he was so like Albert that they might well have been identical twins. My wife declared it was no coincidence; that such things were planned by some extramundane mind beyond our understanding; and while I could not agree with so preposterous a notion (due doubtless to her condition) I was content not to contest the matter. I suggested that as the babes were so much alike it would be as well to tie a ribbon round David's ankle; and although my wife said quite warmly: " Do you think a mother does not know her own child? " she did tie a blue ribbon round David's right ankle as a sop to my masculine precaution, ludicrous as it might be.

The babes slept each in its own cot on the opposite sides of our bed: Albert on the left (which seemed to be more fitting) and David on the right.

When they were a week old I found myself, about five o'clock one morning, unable to sleep; and getting up I went into my study to smoke a cigarette, for I had often found that this quieted the nerves and enabled me to get to sleep.

Coming back into the room I stood for a while looking down on the peacefully sleeping Albert. And then I walked round and looked down upon my sleeping son. Yes, they certainly were alike; but were they as much alike as we had thought? The doubt tormented me. If I could see them side by side I could be sure. I took them out of their cots and taking them over to the windows in my arms (for the sky was lightening) I studied them carefully, and mentally muttered my verdict: as like as two peas.

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I laid them down side by side at the foot of our bed and went over to their cots to arrange the pillows and clothes. When I came back to them I saw the blue ribbon from David's ankle lying on the floor—and I realized to my appalled consternation that I could not now be certain how I had placed the two boys on the bed. I thought of waking my wife and telling her what had happened.

Surely she would know.

But would she? In my heart I did not believe that mothers instinctively knew the babes they had borne, for I had heard so many evidential stories controverting this claim. The last thing I wanted to do was to plant doubt in her heart. It was dreadful enough that it was in my heart. And so, as there was nothing else to do, I mentally tossed up for it and tied the ribbon round the right ankle of the babe I hoped was David. It was no more than a fifty-fifty chance but had it been a thousand to one I had to take it.

In the course of the day I suggested to my wife that a ribbon was a chancy thing and would it not be as well to look for something more permanent. She laughed at my foolishness, but nevertheless agreed; and we found a little mole on the inside of David's thigh just above the knee.

But was it David's thigh or was it Albert's? You see my distressing dilemma. Shall I ever now be certain which is my own son, flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone; and which is that monstrous prodigy, that *homo sempiternus*, Albert Finkleman, the perpetual man? For it will be sixteen years before Albert (or is it David?) will know himself; and I may not then be living for I come of a stock that does not make old bones.

But that, for I wish to be entirely frank, is not the whole reason for my dismay at this intolerable situation.

That unforeseen and disastrous accident of the dropped ankle ribbon has completely shattered my plan. It was an unscrupulous and brutal plan: I freely admit that. Finkleman, for all his long experience of life and his boasted knowledge of men and women, was wrong as regards myself. There may be men and women who are incorruptible and have no price. I do not know. But I am not one of them. I have my price. And unluckily for Finkleman's belief (and equally unluckily as it would have proved for his own precious plan) that price is roughly about a quarter of a million sterling.

I had therefore planned to kill the brat Albert Finkleman the Third.

It would not have been difficult at his tender age. And now, because of that accursed mishap, the plan becomes out of the question. For, unscrupulous and corruptible as I am, I cannot

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bring myself to risk murdering my own son. I suppose for every man there is a limit: a point where conscience steps in. It is a pity. But there it is. And so Finkleman the Third must live. And, for all I shall ever know, Finkleman the Fourth, the Fifth, the Hundredth . . . Finkleman to the crack of Doom.

* * *

ISLAND MAGIC

Whatever the charm, treasure for the adventurous, romance for the world-weary, haven for the storm-tossed, the spell of the island holds author and reader alike. How many of these nine islands can you identify? Allow one point for the name of the island, one for the author, and one for the source. Twenty-one points right, and you are addicted to the fascination of islands as we are! The answers are on page 107.

1. *"How can you expect me to be gentle with you, who have turned my friends into pigs?" the sea wanderer asked the goddess of this enchanted island.*
2. *"I'd a good deal ruther be a pirate now that I've tried it," said the Terror of the Seas. Especially in the virgin forest of an unexplored island!*
3. *Four grey walls and four grey towers hold fast the secret of this silent, flowery river isle.*
4. *"In the farthest angle of the second opening," said the Cardinal's will, and the treasure hunter, on this rocky island where the emerald lizards glittered in the sun, penetrated the deepest, darkest cave.*
5. *Here, in this island of sweet sorcery and phantom voices, is neither bush nor shrub to bear off any weather at all, and another storm brewing!*
6. *For the whole sum of happiness, nine bean rows, a hive for the honey bee, a cricket singing, and the whirr of a bird's wings at nightfall!*
7. *"I wish," said the artist's first admirer in that remote and lovely island, "I could make you see the enchantment . . . with the blue sky overhead and the rich, luxuriant trees . . . And here he lived, unmindful of the world and by the world forgotten."*
8. *Matchless beauty to crown this isle, and manly hearts to guard the fair!*
9. *A race that ends in disaster, as the waves rage white and night draws on, for the father in search of vengeance and the island chieftain's bride.*

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THE ENCHANTED HOUR

When the door of that other world than this is left just slightly ajar

The Five Islands

There's five of 'em (islands) stand thegither, like the pops on a die; and the sea rins in whirlpools a round the inner island; and the jagged coral gies it a bluidy look; and the deadly blue sharks, and the cruel cat fishes, and the slimy tangle, are a' shimmering in the welterin' waters. The centremost island isn't aboon' half a mile ower; it's shaped amaist like a coffin, and covered o'er wi't a ghastly gray sand, and a few stinted trees twisted all shapes, in agony like, by the hurricanes.

One of them is a cedar tree; and just a dozen yards east of it there lies sic a skeleton as man never saw afore. That skeleton has neither leg banes nor arm banes . . . an' its gruesome teeth are clenched on the neck o' another skeleton lying crosswise by its side.

ELIOT WARBURTON, 1810-1852, *Darien*

Alzuna

The forest of Alzuna hides a pool.
Beside that pool, a shadowy tree up-towers.
High on that tree, a bough most beautiful
Bends with the fragrant burden of its flowers.
Among those flowers a nest is buried deep.
Warm in that nest, there lies a freckled shell.
Packed in that shell, a bird is fast asleep.
This is the incantation and the spell.

For, when the north wind blows, the bird will cry,
"Warm in my freckled shell, I lie asleep.
The freckled shell is in the nest on high.
The nest among the flowers is buried deep.
The flowers are on a bough most beautiful.
The bough is on a tree no axe can fell.
The sky is at its feet in yonder pool.
This is the incantation and the spell!"

ALFRED NOYES

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Deep-sea Day

It is peaceful here ; the gay weeds droop
Like preciously fantastic fruit . . .

Yesterday I stumbled on a dell
In this dark forest, where
A galley's company had met again.
Gold ear-rings flashed and white teeth gleamed
And a boy sang plaintive songs of Spain.
Seated among great heaps of gold,
The seamen showed their wounds
And marked their charts. Not one
But thought his coral-eyes would see again,
That his next voyage had at last begun . . .

Here all is peaceful : green palms soothe
The over-burdened mind,
And rainbow-tinted mirages,
Purple, emerald and gold,
Tempt tired feet
To pass, this way and that,
Among the nodding ferns.

So deep-sea day gives place to deep-sea year,
Until at last the sleeping wanderer
Forgets all else but pearly worlds,
And sinks into an opium dream of jade.

HENRY TREECE,
Ivan Morgan and the Mermaid

No Lye

In our lands be Beeres and Lyons of dyvers colours as ye redd, grene, black and white. And in our land be also unicornes and these Unicornes slee many Lyons . . . Also there dare no man make a lye in our lande, for if he dyde he sholde incontynent be sleyn.

Mediaeval Epistle of Pope Prester John

And Then the Fog

The fog comes
on little cat feet.
It sits looking
over harbour and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

CARL SANDBURG

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Faery

At the birth of Helen were present the saps of beauty which flow in the untrodden shadows and the still radiancy of the astral silence. The burning heat of summer was confided to songless birds, the indolence of summer to a barque made of griefs beyond price . . .

For the childhood of Helen the thickets and the deep shadows trembled, the heart of the poor and the legends of heaven were stirred.

Her eyes are more lovely than all shining things ; cool airs that pass, move not so lightly as Helen dancing ; more precious is she than the joy of perfect beauty, than the joy of the perfect hour.

ARTHUR RIMBAUD, 1854-1891,
translated from the French by Helen Rootham

We Do Not Speak of It . . .

It was a windy winter, and outside the cedars were muttering I know not what about . . . Within, a great damp log upon the fireplace began to squeak and sing, and struck upon a whining tune, and a tall flame stood up over it and beat time, and all the shadows crowded round and began to dance. In the distant corners old masses of darkness sat still like chaperones and never moved. Over there, in the darkest part of the room, stood a door that was always locked. It led into the hall, but no one ever used it ; near that door something had happened once of which the family are not proud. We do not speak of it.

There in the firelight stood the venerable forms of the old chairs ; the hands that had made their tapestries lay far beneath the soil, the needles with which they wrought were many separate flakes of rust. No one wove now in that old room—no one but the assiduous ancient spiders . . .

Surely at such an hour, in such a room, a fancy already excited by hunger and strong tea might see the ghosts of former occupants. I expected nothing less . . .

LORD DUNSANY, *The Ghosts*

Here Today

Safe upon the solid rock
the ugly houses stand.
Come and see my shining palace
built upon the sand.

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

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FIRST LOVE

Love belongs to the present, the immediate here and now

by ALIS DE SOLA

SEATED all by herself at the table in the dining saloon of the S.S.*Ciudad de Oro*, Lucia drank in the bubbling wine of freedom. Obviously it had gone to her head: her cheeks were brilliantly flushed, her nostrils dilated, her eyes lustrous. A tiny, excited smile twitched the corners of her full mouth. She was deliriously happy.

Despite her happiness, her behaviour was impeccable. She did not rattle the silverware, as other children might have done, or tilt the water glass or swing her bare legs against the rungs of the chair. Instead she concentrated her entire attention upon the menu on her plate. Occasionally her forefinger rested on an item, and her lips moved soundlessly as she spelled out the words. Then, having made her choice, she summoned the waiter with a slight but imperious turn of the head. It was a gesture which her mother used on similar occasions, and Lucia copied it exactly.

When she gave her order the waiter's dark eyes widened with horror; his mouth opened and closed again. But it was not his business to question the taste of passengers, however young; he merely shrugged his shoulders and went off to do her bidding.

When her dinner arrived Lucia contemplated it with the delight of a dreamer who sees all his wishes effortlessly fulfilled. Immediately in front of her was a large plate of oysters, a mouth-watering full dozen of them she discovered after careful computation. Grouped in a semicircle around the oysters were her three favourite desserts: chocolate pudding, pistachio ice cream and a rich, delectable concoction known in the Caribbean as *bien me sabe* or, in its English equivalent, "it tastes good to me."

Lucia was gulping her eleventh oyster when she became aware of someone standing beside her table. She glanced around and stiffened, instinctively wary. A widely travelled child, she at once recognized the authority symbolized by four gold stripes around the sleeve of a dark blue uniform.

"Good evening. I hope I didn't startle you." The voice was soft and deep and slurred, and there was in it the lazy caress of warm wind, warm water, warm sleep.

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Lucia lifted her head and looked straight at him, the way she had been taught to do when someone spoke to her. "Well, yes, a little bit," she admitted candidly. Deep down in her she knew that she did not have to be guarded with this man. His face had the same weary, indulgent quality as his voice. Soft flesh had begun to blur the lean structure of bone and muscle. The mouth was sweet and full, the eyes bloodshot, heavily lidded and sad. Thick hair dusted with grey swept back from his forehead; a shallow cleft marked his chin.

"I'm sorry," he said gravely, "I didn't mean to. I just thought you might like some company. But I forgot . . ." He took her hand and bowed over it. "Allow me to introduce myself: Captain John Hightower, at your service."

An agreeable and unfamiliar sensation expanded Lucia's lungs. Never before in her eight years of existence had she been treated with such courtliness. It made her feel superior, rather precious—like a princess in a fairy tale. "How do you do," she murmured. Then, remembering her mother's formula she said—dignified, gracious, a little breathless—"Won't you—won't you sit down?"

"With pleasure," the Captain said. He walked to the chair directly across the table from her. He was not a tall man and his body was thickening, but he moved with the easy, graceful co-ordination of a cat. "By the way," he said as he seated himself, you haven't told me who *you* are." When Lucia told him her name he nodded. "I know your father. Ran into him at the Club only yesterday. He said his family was sailing with me today but that he couldn't make it this trip." His eyes surveyed the empty chairs around them, then came back to Lucia and widened humorously. "Don't tell me you're his whole family?" he asked.

"Oh, no!" Lucia smiled. "There's my mother and my brother, Charles, and my sister, Mary, and my other brother, Frederick. He's just a baby. And—there's *Fräulein* too." Her face darkened and her lips pressed tightly together. The governess was her particular dragon, and she regarded her with the same mixture of fear and baffled hatred that a primitive villager might feel towards the monster who has the power to destroy his crops and his hope. Her fear was not physical—*Fräulein* never would dare to lay her hands on her—but metaphysical: the awareness of an evil principle in the very heart of existence.

"Anything wrong?" the Captain asked quietly.

"No." Lucia shook her head for emphasis. She wouldn't think about *Fräulein*; she wouldn't let the thought of her spoil this exciting adventure. "I s'pose you're wondering," she said, "why they didn't come down for dinner."

"Something of the sort," he agreed.

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"Well," she said and paused dramatically, watching the light glint on his raised, inquiring brows, "they're all seasick."

"All of them?"

"All. Even the baby." Her tone was solemn but, as his eyes looked into hers, she began to laugh, suddenly and irrepressibly. She laughed not because her heart was hard but because freedom was a joyous thing, not less so when purchased at the price of others' woe.

Captain Hightower smiled in response. "It's not an uncommon ailment," he said. "Especially on the first day out. More especially on a tub like this." He spoke affectionately, but a hint of contempt edged his words, as if he were measuring this ship, which bore them, against some shining image in his mind of what a ship should be. And it was true that most of the steamers which plied the Caribbean were not exactly impressive. They were small and they were old and they rode the turbulent ocean with the shaky dignity of elderly persons who have seen better days. A curious odour compounded of equal parts of bilge water and ancient vomit, seasoned by the merest whiff of consommé exuded from their decks.

It was the smell, Lucia informed the Captain, which had vanquished Mama. Before she was halfway up the gangplank a dull greenish shadow had settled like a blight on her fine ivory skin. She had clutched helplessly at Papa's arm, closed her eyes and moaned. It was no use his telling her impatiently that she couldn't possibly be sick because the ship was moored fast in harbour waters still as glass; she was sick. She had hurried along to her cabin like a creature pursued, for once oblivious of the baby in *Fräulein*'s arms, of the older children skipping precariously up the steeply inclined ramp. She had taken to her bed immediately, a handkerchief soaked in Eau de Cologne on her forehead and a vial of smelling salts in her hand.

The resulting confusion had been terrific. "It was Papa's fault, mostly," Lucia said thoughtfully and meditated, not for the first time, on the odd fact that her father's passion for order almost invariably led to its opposite.

After Mama's collapse he had taken charge of the situation and organized their dispersal in the three adjoining cabins with the mad logic of a demented general. *Fräulein* would share Mama's cabin, he had decided, in order to attend to her wants, give comfort and otherwise make herself useful. The two boys and the two girls would be quartered, according to sex, in the other cabins. Mama had reminded him weakly that one of the boys was an infant in arms, but he had dismissed the objection as trivial. So Charles had to stand by helplessly while the baby screamed, and Mary kept running in and out of the three cabins looking for the doll which

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she had entrusted to Papa and which he had misplaced somewhere when he started moving the suitcases around. It was very chaotic indeed.

The Captain had been listening with fascination to Lucia's animated narrative. "Good heavens!" he said, making deep, lazy music of the phrase. "Did you ever get things straightened out?"

"Oh, yes," Lucia assured him. When the second warning bell sounded Papa had simply thrown up his hands and marched off, shouting angry goodbyes and leaving an extraordinary feeling of peace in his wake. It had lasted long enough—the mass seasickness being a gradual development—for them to rearrange themselves into a more realistic pattern. The baby had been returned to Mama, with a solicitous stewardess in attendance to take care of them both. Mary fell to *Fräulein* because she was the next to youngest. That left her, Lucia, with Charles, as they had planned from the beginning. "You see," she explained earnestly, "he likes me and I like him. So it doesn't matter if we fight sometimes."

The Captain agreed that it didn't matter. "Not if you really like each other." he said. He was leaning towards her now, his elbows on the table, his linked hands supporting his chin. A curious smile twisted the corners of his mouth, and his eyes stared straight at, but beyond, her, as though he saw some unhappy picture on the other side of her head. It was the way Charles had looked—beyond comfort, beyond hope—when the little pig which bore his name was slaughtered for the barbecue.

When people looked like that it meant that they had lost something which they loved. She watched him anxiously, then asked after a moment, "Do you hurt very much?"

His head jerked up, and he gazed at, not beyond, her now—a startled, incredulous gaze. "You little witch!" he exclaimed. "How did you know?"

Shyness overcame Lucia, the bewildering, suffocating shyness which afflicts those who usually are unselfconscious until their heedless candour suddenly confronts them with the image of themselves in another's mind. She had made the great leap of sympathy; she had perched briefly in the very centre of an alien consciousness, feeling what it felt, sharing its woe. Now that she was ousted from that precarious foothold, driven back upon herself, she was appalled by her rashness.

The heavy man across the table was not Charles, in whose being, linked by comradeship and affection to hers, she was free to trespass; he was a stranger, a grownup, a person in authority, the all-powerful captain of the ship. As so often before, she had been impertinent. Burning with shame she hung her head.

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The captain had risen from his chair and was standing beside her again. She could feel the stiff gold braid on his sleeve rasping her bare arm, but she dared not look at him, fearing the thunder of displeasure she might meet. For a moment, while she sat rigid with agonized apprehension, he just stood there, silent. Then slowly, carefully, the words falling softly, as quiet rain, he said, "I'm sorry, Lucia. I've always been clumsy with women. Will you forgive me?"

She could hardly believe her ears. He had, if only by implication, called her a woman; he had accepted her into the mystic sorority formed by the adult members of her sex. Shyness was forgotten, dissipated by the high wind of pride which swept through her body. Her heart was swelling, swelling like a giant balloon. It seemed as though it must burst in another instant, explode in the air with a loud, satisfying pop. She began to laugh at the thought and then she laughed harder and harder, her head flung back in a gleeful spasm.

Captain Hightower was smiling down at her. He rumpled her hair, his fingers moving gently over the golden head. When her laughter had subsided into intermittent hiccoughs he touched her cheek in a light gesture of farewell. "You're a darling," he said. "I'll be seeing you, Lucia."

She did not say, "Don't go." She did not clutch the beautiful gold-barred sleeve to hold him, but her wide eyes followed him as he threaded his way among the tables. Where the great balloon of her heart had been there now was a hollow, echoing void. Watching him disappear through the door leading to the companionway, her breath caught in a last, prolonged hiccough, like a sob.

Feeling both lonely and proud, she speared the remaining oyster and swallowed it absently. In the same casual, inattentive fashion she disposed of the chocolate pudding. Then in the very act of reaching for the ice cream she checked herself, her small face set and aware. For a long moment she stared at the two tempting dishes before her, the cool green ice cream, the golden, luscious *bien me sabe*. She sighed, her head moving slowly from side to side in reluctant negation. No woman, no grown-up woman, would permit herself more than one dessert.

"Is he as handsome as Papa?" Charles asked.

It was his first comment; he had listened silently, with grave attentiveness, to Lucia's account of her meeting with the Captain. The seasickness of the day before had further refined his delicate face, hollowing out the already deep eye sockets and giving a translucent pallor to his skin. He lay prone on the life raft, propped up on both elbows, his chin resting comfortably in the cup made by his hands.

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Sitting cross-legged beside him Lucia pondered the question. Until this moment the idea of the Captain had been identified with a warm glow inside her, in the region just above and slightly to the left of the stomach, and she found it difficult to translate this pleasant sensation into the reality of the man who had aroused it. She thought of his caressing voice, his tender hands and, for an instant, she saw him as he should have been, as perhaps he had been in youth: erect and slim, with a clear shining glance and a mouth gay, not sad.

"Well, is he?" Charles persisted.

Lucia shook her head. The vision already had crumbled, unable to survive the impact of her exact and ruthless memory. "No," she said at last, remembering the thickened body, the blurred and weary face. "He's old and sort of fat." She added reluctantly, "There are red streaks in his eyes."

Her brother's left eyebrow rose, and a look of polite depreciation tightened his lips. Lucia's heart winced, as at a betrayal. The captain's image flawed but still adorable, turned its back on her in reproach and walked away as he had done last night, threading his way among the tables with an assured and easy grace.

Suddenly she smiled. Another memory had slipped into her mind, the memory of a plump blonde cat which had once strolled through the world with that same unruffled and graceful assurance. "He walks like Balthasar," she said happily. "Exactly like Balthasar."

"Balthasar was a nice cat," Charles said, after a pause. His voice was not quite steady. Balthasar was dead, having stepped blithely under the car wheels and into eternity some five or six months before. It was an extremely painful recollection for Charles, as Lucia realized almost at once. Always too readily moved, he blinked back tears and shifted around so that he lay facing the horizon which melted hazily into a sea as serene and vividly blue as the sky above it.

Lucia looked at him in perplexity. The big tomcat had been no less dear to her than to her brother, but she lacked his fidelity to remembered emotion. Though the soft amber beauty of Balthasar was forever entrenched in her heart, though he would continue to glide on padded feet through her dreams, she could not grieve for him any more. Grief, and love too, belonged to the present, the immediate here and now. Charles was different, of course, and she was sorry she had reminded him.

Flinging herself down beside his slight, rigid body, she peered over the edge of the raft at the foaming water below. Something dark and sleekly shaped showed briefly beneath the lacy spume. "I think I see a whale," she announced, ignoring geographical probability.

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Charles' interest was aroused, as she had known it would be. His glance followed her pointing finger. "That's not a whale," he contradicted, "it's a porpoise."

It was a school of porpoises. Another and still another broke the surface of the waves, leaping into the air and then plunging back again, gambolling away the sunny hours as though there always would be more of them, as though the sun and sea and springy muscles were things they could count on forever.

"Fun, aren't they?" At the sound of the voice Lucia's heart leaped and plunged like a flying fish. She swivelled around on her belly, and there was Captain Hightower leaning casually against the side of the raft, his face on a level with hers. He tipped his cap. "Hello, Lucia," he said. "How are you this lovely morning?"

"I—I'm fine," she said.

"Good." He smiled at her and at Charles who had scrambled to his knees and was rocking back and forth on them, politely waiting to be noticed. "Is this the brother you were telling me about?"

"I'm Charles," Charles said with the dignity of an ambassador presenting his credentials.

Captain Hightower nodded. "Glad to meet you, Charles." He had a subtle courtesy; it transmuted the dull phrase into golden truth. For a while he discoursed pleasantly on porpoises and related topics, deferring to their opinions, an equal among equals, or so at least he made it seem. That the assumption was not altogether valid he indicated only later and with a charming hesitancy. "Look here," he said, fingering the canvas cover of the raft, "you're not really supposed to climb up on these things. Dangerous, you know. You might fall overboard."

They certainly did know. *Fräulein* had issued a series of warnings before leaving them to play on the hurricane deck. Persuading Charles to ignore them had not been very difficult, but now Lucia felt profoundly ashamed of herself. She muttered something contrite and inaudible, one bare leg already over the side. *Fräulein* would have been astonished to witness the docility displayed by this most anarchic of her charges; *Fräulein* was unacquainted with the power of love.

Taking Lucia by both elbows, the Captain lowered her gently to the deck. "Silly to fuss on such a calm day," he apologized. "But it does turn choppy suddenly in these waters. And I'd hate to lose you two." His hand rested on her head, and she could feel its light pressure, insinuating as a whisper, inviting capitulation.

"I promise I won't climb any more," Lucia said in a low voice. She was surrendering freedom and high adventure but she could not resist him; she no longer belonged to herself. If he had asked her

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to remain chained in the hold for the rest of the trip she would have given in as easily.

" I won't either," Charles said, sliding quickly off the raft.

Captain Hightower nodded as though such reasonableness were only to be expected. " That's fine. It's very good of you to promise. Thanks ever so much." Saluting smartly he turned and walked in the direction of the bridge.

" He does walk like Balthasar," Charles remarked judiciously. " And he's nice like Balthasar too."

" He's the nicest man in the whole world ! " Lucia proclaimed with ardour.

For Lucia it was the beginning of a new existence, a bewildering, delicious bondage which was like nothing she ever had known. She was accustomed to external discipline, to orders she could sometimes defy or evade if obedience proved too galling. But this strange, sweet coercion came from within, and she had neither the experience to understand it nor the art to cope with it.

She was not, in the days that followed, altogether happy. To the independent spirit love is always a traitor. It breaks down the walls behind which the dreaming self reigns absolute, like a god in its power and glory. The once potent self is dethroned ; it crouches in the rubble like a beggar with hand outstretched for sustenance, anxious for the look, the word, the smile which alone can now maintain its life.

On shipboard it is not an impossible task to keep close to the object of one's desire. Particularly on a ship as small as the S.S. *Ciudad de Oro*, the area of surveillance is limited within the compass even of a child's activity. Circumstances combined to favour Lucia. The chronic threat of nausea kept her mother immobilized in a deck chair, and *Fräulein* was too busy with the younger children to be her usual vigilant self. So Lucia was free to trail behind Captain Hightower like some imperfectly detached remnant of himself. She was free to stand for hours regarding him as he paced the bridge, to be always at hand when he had the leisure and inclination to chat.

They spoke of many things together, of oceans and stars, horses and bugs and hurricanes, the deceased Balthasar and the cotton fields, stretching like snow, around Captain Hightower's boyhood home. Sometimes Charles joined in their conversations but more often he was elsewhere, having turned away in sorrow from his sister's baffling absorption in this ageing stranger.

There were other boys on board and, now that his first and dearest comrade was lost to him, Charles found a rather pleasing diversion in their uncomplicated fellowship. With them he explored

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the engine rooms, played endless games of quoits and shuffleboard and learned, under the tutelage of a friendly sailor, to tie a variety of wonderful knots.

He did his faithful best to include Lucia in these fascinating new avocations. " Do you want me to show you how to make a bowline? " he asked Lucia one morning, offering her a length of frayed rope.

She shrugged a disdainful shoulder. " No. That's a stupid boys' game."

" You used to like to play boys' games," he reminded her sadly.

It was true. Lucia stared at him dismayed, realizing belatedly how things had changed between them, feeling the first chill breath of an alien wind. They had begun the long, obscure journey of life together; they had pooled the equipment of their separate temperaments, sharing whatever burdens there were, like all good travellers. Now ahead of them the road forked, and it seemed that each must proceed alone . . .

There was something in *Fräulein* which resented happiness, something bitter, suspicious and unreconciled, the dark germ to whose infection the world owes all its villains. On the afternoon before the ship was due to land she marched grimly into Mama's cabin, where Charles and Lucia were amiably chatting with their mother and enjoying their regular post-luncheon treat of candied ginger.

She had chanced to overhear a conversation between two giggling stewardesses, she informed Mama, a gleam in her small, colourless eyes. A most peculiar conversation. It had led her to ask them a few pointed questions.

" She's a sly one," she said, indicating Lucia, who backed up against the washstand at this signal of danger.

Mama, too, was apprehensive. Her children were an extension of her own oversensitive self, an added area of vulnerability. " What do you mean ? " she asked uneasily.

Fräulein was not to be hurried. She was nibbling at her information, savouring it as if it were a piece of deliciously burning, aromatic ginger. " We thought she was behaving so well," she said. " We thought she was playing nice games with Charles and the other little boys and girls. Well, she wasn't." She paused, her mottled dirty-pink skin taking on a deeper tone. " Instead, she's been hanging around the Captain. All the time. Morning and afternoon. Everybody says she's in love with him. They think it's very funny. I don't agree."

Lucia shivered, closed her eyes. She could not bear to look at *Fräulein*. But the germ of destruction had passed into her brain.

Mama had relaxed. " That's not a nice thing to do, Lucia," she

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said in mild reproof. "You mustn't annoy other people."

"The Captain doesn't mind," Charles put in loyally. "He likes her. He says she's a darling."

"Does he?" Mama murmured, pleased by the tribute to her daughter.

An acrid smile stretched *Fräulein's* thin mouth. "That makes it even worse. I'm told he's a man of low character. They say he drinks and—and other things." She glanced significantly at Mama. "His wife had to leave him."

"*Fräulein!*" Mama's tone was quick and sharp. "Not before the children, please."

When she turned to Lucia she was trembling a little and, though she tried to speak quietly, there was still that sharp edge to her voice. "Listen to me, Lucia. Have you—did the Captain—has he ever asked you to go to his cabin with him?" Her body was rigid, her arms pressed tightly to her sides. "Tell me. You must tell me the truth."

Lucia shrank back against the porcelain bowl of the washstand. She felt it through the thin cloth of her dress, cold and hard on her shoulders, but her mind was empty, drained of everything except terror. None of this cryptic conversation was intelligible to her, but she sensed the malignancy behind it. The words corrupted the air in the narrow little room and made it difficult to breathe.

Charles had crossed the room to stand beside Lucia, erect and vigilant. "We waited at the door once. He went in to get us some gumdrops."

Mama drew in a long, shuddering sigh and slumped down upon a chair. Relief had brought back her nausea; the greenish colour settled over her face again.

Fräulein was not as readily satisfied. "You haven't answered your mother's question. Lucia. Were you ever in the Captain's cabin? Alone with him?"

Anger rose in Lucia, a wave of it, mightier than her fear or the stifling odour of corruption. As though something had been released in her she sprang at her governess. "No!" she screamed. "No! No! No!" Her small fists beat upon the obdurate body as upon a drum. "You're a horrid, nasty, mean old woman!" she yelled, beside herself with rage and a strong subterranean joy. "Go away! Go away! I hate you!"

"So do I!" Charles shouted. He poised himself, took careful aim and delivered an accurate kick on *Fräulein's* shin.

The battles of children against their elders, lost causes in essence, are foredoomed to defeat. Always they end the same way, proof of the disagreeable fact that the weak are weak. In a matter of minutes Lucia found herself confined for the afternoon in *Fräulein's* cabin.

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Charles in the one next door.

For the first half-hour they amused themselves by tapping on the connecting wall between the rooms, but this pastime soon palled. Though Charles had at his command some scraps of Morse code, recently acquired from the radio operator, his sister could neither understand nor respond, so it failed to serve its communicative purpose. They lapsed into solitary meditation.

Lucia did not waste much energy in bewailing the injustice of her lot. She had behaved better in the last few days than in her entire previous history and she was being punished for it. But injustice is woven into the very texture of children's lives, and they learn soon the folly of protest.

Punishment can, however, be circumvented if one uses one's head. Like all weak creatures, like humanity itself, Lucia had made the astonishing discovery that what one cannot win in open conflict one may frequently win by guile. Her one compelling purpose was to see the Captain again. If she no longer could do this overtly —and Mama had been extremely firm about the matter—she would have to attempt it in secret. The solution occurred to her in a brilliant flash.

Night was the time for secrets. Grownups, even *Fräulein*, had to sleep. She beat a jubilant tattoo on the wall and then, realizing that Charles could have no idea what it meant, gave up and stuck her head out of the porthole. A thin mist was beginning to blot out the sea.

By evening this chiffon-like vapour had turned into a solid, enveloping substance which lay on the ship like a shroud. Voices lost their resonance, footsteps became softer and less emphatic, as if the deck had been padded with velvet. At regular intervals the long, wailing cry of the foghorn reached out across the now invisible water—the cry of a tortured ghost, a demon lover calling through the eternity of hell for his mate.

Lucia tried not to think about hell. She did not quite believe in it any more, yet she continued to dread it. *Fräulein* was an authority on this unpleasant region, which was made to order, in her opinion, for recalcitrant boys and girls. The fog, following so opportunely upon the afternoon's indiscretions, had given *Fräulein* the opening for a novel approach to her favourite theme which, expressed in its simplest terms, was that God would punish in the next world whoever crossed her, *Fräulein*, in this one. The fog, as she was careful to explain during the evening meal, brought the next world appreciably nearer. Fogs caused collisions; collisions caused sinkings; sinkings caused death by drowning.

At this point Mary, who was not at the moment threatened with

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damnation, but disliked the idea of drowning, broke into resentful sobs and had to be carried from the table, effectively putting an end to *Fräulein*'s discourse.

" Do you think she's telling the truth ? " Charles asked, his brow creased in thought.

" No." The flat denial gave Lucia comfort without entirely convincing her. There was always a chance, and what she was planning to do later in the evening would leave her no leg to stand on if, subsequently, she were required to meet a deity face to face. Contemplating the enormity of her projected act, she sighed deeply . . .

The ship's bell rang six times—eleven o'clock—as Lucia closed the door of the cabin behind her and walked, with a thrill of apprehension, into what seemed a thick, yielding white wall. Guiding herself by the bulkhead she inched along until she reached the ladder leading to the hurricane deck.

This familiar structure, up and down which she had scampered a dozen times a day, the number of whose rungs she remembered as well as she did her own age, now loomed frighteningly high and unmountable before her. For an instant, while the foghorn wailed, she wished she were back in the cabin in her own bunk, with the sheets pulled over her head and Charles reassuringly asleep in the upper bunk. But as the last lingering echo melted into silence and darkness, her courage returned. Clinging hard to the iron handrail she started to climb.

It was better on the hurricane deck. Somehow the fog seemed thinner here ; the shapes of lifeboats and rafts, though fuzzily outlined, were recognizable, like the half perceived features of friends. Moving much faster now, her white terry-cloth robe flapping in the cool damp wind, she approached the Captain's cabin.

The " Come in," with which he replied to her tentative knock, was as muffled as every other sound. " Lucia ! " he cried softly, fuzzily, as she slipped like a shred of mist through the door. " What's the matter ? What are you doing here ? " he asked in astonishment. He was lolling in a deep armchair, a glass full of an amber-toned liquid in one hand, the other dangling limply over the side of the chair. His face was flushed, his hair rumpled and the heavy lids of his eyes blinked again and again as though cobwebs were tangled in their dense lashes. Wrinkles marred the splendour of his uniform. He looked curiously younger, like a tired, unhappy boy.

Lucia stared at him intently, absorbing each subtle alteration in the remembered image without understanding what they meant, knowing only that something was wrong, that she hurt in some undefined part of herself. A lump grew in her throat, her mouth

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trembled and hot tears spilled down her cheeks.

"Why, Lucia!" He put down his glass and in a single lithe movement he gathered her up in his arms. "There," he said, settling her on his lap. "There. Now tell me what's the matter. Tell Captain Johnny about it, darling."

"Is the ship going to sink?" Lucia sobbed. She was not really worried about this eventuality any longer; it was simply a peg upon which to hang her otherwise incomprehensible misery.

"Of course not!" There was no trace now of the thick, sweet accents; the words rang distinct as a bell. "Wherever did you get such a crazy idea, honey child?"

Lucia relaxed against him. A knot untied itself slowly in her chest. Feeling comfortable again, safe and warm, she launched into a detailed account of *Fräulein*'s lurid prophecies. "She's silly, isn't she?" she asked in a superior tone.

"Very silly and very wicked," Captain Hightower said. He sounded grave. "Your mother should be told about this."

Lucia was surprised. Such an idea never had entered her mind; the concept of Mama was infinitely remote from the terrors and raptures of the soul.

"In fact," the Captain continued grimly, "I think I'll tell her myself." As though to punctuate the resolve he picked up the glass on the little table beside him and drained it at one gulp.

It seemed to Lucia a singularly appealing gesture. "*Fräulein* is so stupid," she remarked airily. "She thinks you're a bad man because you drink."

A dull red stain crept over the Captain's face. Slowly, carefully, he replaced the empty glass. As he had done on the first evening of their acquaintance, he stared beyond Lucia at some unhappy picture not visible to anybody but himself. "Maybe she's right," he said at last.

"She isn't. She *isn't!*" Lucia protested with all the vehemence of which she was capable.

"Somebody else had the same idea," the Captain continued, but he spoke so softly that she might have been overhearing his thoughts, and his eyes still were fixed on some point beyond her.

Turning her head to follow the direction of his gaze Lucia saw that it had a focus: a picture in a silver frame stood on the chest of drawers against the opposite wall. The rosebud mouth, the wide-spaced eyes, the flying cloud of golden hair were intimately known to her: she had seen them all before, over and over again, in her books of fairy tales.

"That was my wife," the Captain said. "She ran away from me and died soon after."

"Was she a princess?" Lucia asked shyly, enchanted by the

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vision of loveliness across the room.

He shook his head. "No. Just a foolish, frightened little girl." He sighed and looked deep into Lucia's wondering eyes. "There you have me, Lucia. A bad man who frightens little girls."

She had no name for the twisting ache inside her; she never had heard of pity, love's spendthrift, shabby twin. But a precocious wisdom told her what to do. She flung her arms around him, leaning her soft hot face against his throat. "It isn't true," she crooned. "You're good. I love you." And then, remembering a grave, ardent phrase she had read somewhere: "I give you my whole heart."

The Captain held her so hard that she could feel the buttons of his uniform pressing into her flesh. When he finally disengaged himself his face had a sort of ravaged serenity, like that of a statue eroded by years of burial in the earth. "Thank you, Lucia," he said. "Thank you very much." He took her hand and lifted it to his lips. "It's *you* who are the princess," he said. "And now," he swung her gently to the floor and got up himself, "I'm going to see you back to your cabin. It's very late, you know."

It was late, and drowsiness was seeping like fog into her brain, threatening with oblivion what should have been her proudest moment. She rubbed her eyes to clear them and looked for the last time at the figure standing in the now open doorway. He had smoothed his jacket and picked up his cap, but these insignia of worldly authority were not enough to disguise the vulnerable image of love.

Lucia walked up to him and took his outstretched hand. "Will you marry me when I grow up?" she asked soberly.

His fingers tightened over hers as they stepped out together upon the misty deck. "Ask me again in ten years," the deep, tender voice was murmuring, and she knew she never would forget it—not in ten years, or twenty or ever. "I'll be waiting for you, Lucia."

He, or another like him, would be waiting. She was a princess and prodigal, as is the way of royalty, giving her heart, that crisp, tart, perdurable fruit, to whoever needed its nourishment, whoever, by word or smile or sorrowful glance, reached out and made it his.

* * *

LESSON IN COMPOSITION

Truth may be stranger than fiction, but it is seldom as artistic.

CHARLES LOW

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DEEP LIES THE TREASURE

And all the rainbow glitter of it awaits the brave—or the foolish

by WILLIAM LINDSAY GRESHAM

LOOKING down over the side, he could see nothing but the impenetrable surface of the sea, leaden, wrinkled, seething. A wind as cold as a drowned man's bones had begun to whip down on them from the north, making the clumsy *Golfin* roll heavily. It did not matter; after thirty years of working in the dark, a diver has a steady head and an extra pair of eyes in it. Manuel stared down with his extra inward eyes, through that grey skin of the sea, down through the green spaces glinting with schools of small fish; below them again to deeps where the light died out. Blackness, crushing weight and great goggle eyes staring amazed into the diver's lantern. Down again, till his thoughts clanged against steel.

Two hundred and fifty feet below, resting motionless on a hard sand bottom, lay the drowned hulk of the *Tobermory*; sides crusted with barnacles, her decks slippery, port bow torn open by the torpedo that had sunk her. In her hold much treasure in a small room, and Juanito.

Behind Manuel the *telefonista* said something, shifting the black box of his undersea telephone. Manuel turned his right ear, which still had a good eardrum in it. "Juanito?" he said.

"He is all right. What I say is, have you tobacco?"

The old diver drew a packet of cigarette papers from the woollen sash wrapped loosely around his waist, took a pinch of black long-cut tobacco from a hidden packet, and bent the paper around it, leaning against the bulwark and facing the wind. He handed the cigarette to the sailor, then made another for himself.

The *telefonista* took a puff and watched the smoke blow away. "The wind rises." Grinning, he looked over his shoulder at a man who lay in a folding chair by the deckhouse. "Don Francisco will be seasick."

Manuel glanced at the pinched lips, the pinched nostrils, the closed bloodless eyelids of the reclining man. "The *señorito!*" he grunted, with the Basque's thousand-year-old contempt. "That he comes on the water at all is one of God's miracles."

The sailor grinned again. "'Gold makes a *caballero* brave,'"

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he quoted. "Also, no doubt he has great fear we will steal it if he takes his eyes off us. They say it is a very great treasure."

"It is the robbing of a corpse," said Manuel.

"It is your son who does it."

"Juanito does a job," Manuel told him gruffly. "Don Francisco pays. He provides the iron kettle, the depth armour. Let the guilt be his. I am a working diver, not a grave robber. I would not have had Juanito take the job, but can a man take a whip to a grown son? The boy is money-mad, like all the young ones . . . Eh! What is Juanito doing now?"

The *telefonista* spoke lazily into the mouthpiece of his instrument. "Juanito, your father worries about you." Without waiting for an answer, he talked on, this time to Manuel, "You are a fool to worry, old man. That pressure suit is safe like a church. No air lines, no bends; a child could dive in it straight from his mother's arms." He spoke with a certain grudging pride. "Don Francisco does things the modern way, no?"

Manuel spat, saying nothing, listening for a voice from the black box. Modern? All the *señorito* had was the pressure suit, the iron boiler with hooks for hands in which a child could have dived; and that suit, as everyone knew, had been bought cheap. There had put into port by night a submarine with a swastika still showing through a splash of new paint on her conning tower; the blond-heads, officers all, needing money for fuel to get them off in a hurry to safe lands in South America. And this sea-going tug, the *Golfin*, Don Francisco had rented cheap. She was less like the dolphin of her name than a stranded whale; she had been warped to a pier so long that the shipworms had gnawed her timbers, the gulls had covered her with their droppings.

Even the pressure armour—the bulbous steel monstrosity in which a man sat safely at ease on a seat like that of a bicycle—it was not complete. It should have been lowered on a great steel cable with a telephone line woven into it. But the modern *señorito* had rigged it with nothing better than a manilla line, the telephone cord lashed on with twine here and there. Don Francisco had the suit, but not the steel cable.

"What does the boy say?" the old man asked, breaking in on some chatter of the *telefonista* about a pagan prince of the Indies, he who had shipped the treasure westward for safekeeping in the wartime. "What does Juanito say?"

"Juanito?" the *telefonista* called into the mouthpiece, breaking off his talk abruptly. "Hallo, hallo, hallo. Juanito, how goes it?"

Manuel came closer to him, cupping his hand behind his good ear to listen for the gay, mocking and sweetly foolish voice of his son. But from the loud-speaker hole there came only silence. Not even

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the rattle and clink of Juanito working the hook hands, or the thud of his steel-encased feet on the sunken deck. Silence, and the wind rising, and the *Golfin* heaving at her hawsers in a new way, with a sickening backward lurch. The twisting tidal current called the Eel, which Manuel knew like a lover, had begun to turn.

"Juanito!" barked the *telefonista*. "How goes it? Say something, man."

The deck chair behind them creaked as the man in it pushed off his blanket and sat up.

"Don Francisco, he does not answer," said the young seaman, turning from his instrument.

The *señorito* tucked the steamer rug back under his knees and held his gold lighter against the end of his cigarette, cupping the flame in a hand on which the fingernails glistened like a vain woman's. "Call him again. Perhaps he has fallen asleep," he said in his lisping inland talk. "After all, nothing can happen to him, eh?" This last was for Manuel, with a smile meant to be reassuring. Manuel scowled and waited.

"Juanito! Juanito, say something! What happens?"

Silence from the black box. The manilla line from the winch creaked against the ship's side. At the end of that manilla strand, forty fathoms down, Juanito lived encased in steel. If he still lived.

"The Eel has turned," Manuel muttered to the telephone handler. "Perhaps Juanito is foul of the wreck."

"He can cut his lines free from inside," the young seaman explained patiently. "He can blow water from the suit's ballast tanks and float himself up. Nothing can happen to him. If he has cut loose, naturally he is not on the telephone."

"Try the line," the old diver said, pointing. "No one knows what tricks the Eel can play in the hold of such a dead ship."

A current named by the fishermen of generations gone. Below them she ran softly shoreward, *la Anguila*, the Eel. She would do that; run lightly one way, gathering speed with the tide, then fall to rest awhile, then turn suddenly and come twisting and coiling back, throwing a coil about you. She was most dangerous when she rested, for then you forgot her.

The *señorito*—the little gentleman in cream-coloured riding breeches—had thought at first that he would do his own diving, getting the job done cheap, with a fine story to tell afterwards. He had climbed into the safe and easy pressure suit and had them lower him from the boom, but when the green sea light dimmed to blackness and the Eel pulled at him, he had screamed into his telephone for help.

Then he had sent for the firm of Manuel Echeveira & Son; that was why their grimy fishing boat was now made fast to the

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Golfin, why they had come aboard. Manuel, grey, squat and glum, an old diver now limited to shallow water work on leaky hull plates and fouled propellers; a silent man, bending his one good ear to listen. And Juanito, slim and brown and laughing out of the corners of his black eyes; his speech too facile, his hands too restless for a diver. Yet he was a good diver, clever with those hands in the heavy dark or in the dusty murk of harbour waters.

"Gently," the old man said now to the winchman, without asking Don Francisco, without asking anyone. "Try it gently. Fish for him."

The winch driver threw in his clutch, the drum revolved slowly and the manilla line lifted inch by inch, glistening with the sea. The tugboat beneath them slanted up suddenly as a seventh wave heaved her higher than the others. For a moment the line drew taut. The winch drum stopped, thrown out of gear by the driver, but the ship continued to rise. Then the line slackened and ripped loose, to the cries of the winchman and the telephone handler. It coiled snakily for a moment and then tightened, fouled somewhere below.

Manuel stood looking down at Don Francisco in his deck chair. The *señorito's* face was a shade paler now, and his cigarette dropped to the deck and was swept into the scuppers by the wind.

"Tell your men to dress me," Manuel said dryly. "The Eel and your boiler with legs have trapped my son."

The feel of his own old suit was comforting, but, patched and barnacle-scarred as it was, would it hold for work at forty fathoms? He drew the woollen cap over his ears, and the sailors lowered his helmet into place. There was no telephone cable; long since he had given it up, being too deaf. It didn't matter; no guidance would help but that of the good Lord if he were to find Juanito at that depth. *He is my son*, thought Manuel, *and at my age a man begets no more sons.*

As the glass face plate swung shut, Manuel felt the familiar burled edges of the hose valve under his left arm and twisted it to give his old lungs more air. This hiss of the air roared in his one good ear. He drew on his heavy working gloves and plodded to the bulwark where the descending line dropped over the side, its other end made fast to the *Tobermory* far below.

The sea's surface was leaden, slick, coiling like the skin of an eel. He caught the descending line in one glove. The first wave lashed at his feet. The second licked his hand, its chill soaking through the glove. The surface of ocean rose to meet him; spray, a blur, and then the soft casual light, and the surface closed above his head, like a trembling silver sky.

The dark shape of the *Golfin* loomed beside him. Old Manuel

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opened the hose valve a little more, and the air droned comfortingly. He reached up and turned the exhaust valve, feeling the suit grip him with the change in pressure. As he went down the light dimmed first to the blue of summer evening, and then to night.

Darkness and the deep. Manuel swallowed, opening his mouth wide and shaking his head, adjusting the pressure inside his head to the great weight of the sea outside. His good ear began to ache and he swallowed again and snorted. The ache stopped, but still the ear felt clogged.

At ninety feet he stopped; the hands on deck were obeying his instructions; they had measured his life line while paying it out and now were marking it at ninety feet. So far, all was well. He gripped the descending line and hung on, waiting. His heart pounded.

Manuel felt a tug on his line. He returned it and began to sink again, the guide line sliding up through his hands. Darkness and the deep. What had made Juanito's line break at the winch's lift he could not tell; whether he could make it fast again he did not know. A diver who thinks ahead into trouble makes trouble for himself. Manuel went down thinking of nothing but the pressure, keeping it always a little greater inside the suit than the weight of the sea.

The black faded to grey. Looking down, he saw sandy bottom stretching away briefly into twilight, reflections of surface light shimmering faintly from its whiteness. Below him, booms slanting, funnels gaping, careened the drowned dark hulk of the *Tobermory*.

When his lead soles finally landed on a slippery slope of deck Manuel gave his line another tug and waited, the bubbles from his exhaust valve swirling above him as he looked up. A ball of orange light descended followed by a crowd of foolish fishes gaping their mouths at this new wonder. He seized the light in his stiff gloves, released it from its shackle and turned it towards the bow of the *Tobermory*. The light lost itself in the dusty sea.

Juanito had gone down the forward hatchways, cutting the cover loose, somewhere there ahead of him, up the steep slippery deck. Manuel had a swift mental picture of Don Francisco pointing out the right spot on a diagram of the ship, while Juan's swaggering black curls leaned over the *señorito's* shoulder.

"In my sleep I could find it," the boy had boasted. Idiot. Baby. The old man remembered Juanito's first dive, with a shrimp pail over his head, in ten feet of filthy harbour water. Manuel had pulled him out and wrapped him in blankets until the little boy's lips turned from blue to coral pink again. Juanito, the baby, the vain, impulsive one, trusting in his strength and his swagger. But Juanito was a good diver, for all his foolishness of youth.

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Slowly, planting his feet with infinite care, Manuel began to inch up the slimy deck. There was a plucking at his legs in their canvas-and-rubber casing. It grew; it was a steady pull, as if a wind were blowing, and then he was leaning on it, struggling forward against the full rush of the Eel. He braced himself and opened his exhaust valve, letting air out in a rumbling shudder to gain more weight.

As the bubbles thundered up behind his head the little fish took fright and scurried out of the lamp's foggy golden beam. Manuel felt the deflating suit grip his chest and let the pressure rise as high as he dared before he tightened the valve. Now, with the added weight to help him, he bent forward again.

Sand lay in shelving dunes about the deck. It covered crates of deck cargo, still lashed in place, and drifted deep against the davits of the unlaunched lifeboats. Something tripped Manuel, and looking down he saw a white bone in the lamp shine emerging from a heap of sand. As his foot touched it, a cloudy puff of sand rose and it came free in the current—a leg and bare foot, perfectly preserved by its cold, gritty burial. The Eel took it silently and swept it over the side. Manuel went on.

There were other mounds, sand-covered. They had gone down clinging to the lifeboats, and the sea had gulped them, the pressure had squeezed them till they would not float; and the cork jackets about them, with water forced into all the pores of the cork, were like so much lead.

Ahead of him was an empty stretch of deck, bare of sand, and at its farther side, a pale curve in the murk, Juanito's line trailed from the dark hole of the hatch, fouled somehow below decks, so that the Eel could not draw it loose. Manuel stopped. Here some of the deck cargo had torn free and plunged over the *Tobermory*'s side to the sea floor, smashing a great gap in the bulwark by which he had been feeling his way. There was nothing now but his sure-footedness between him and the thing divers fear most—a drop in deep water, pressure rising too fast to control with the valves, the squeeze.

"Eh," he said aloud. He was barely moving his lips, yet the whisper was a sibilant roar in his helmet. "Two things a Basque knows, the mountains and the sea. And can a man go higher or deeper than God?"

He started cautiously up the unprotected deck. One step, feeling the way with leaden soles, and then another. His lamp beam cut barely five yards ahead of him through the water. Stray ends of lines came slanting towards him, bits of the deck-cargo lashings. One line trailed from a boom, and the old man caught its slippery surface in his glove and used it to help pull himself up the deck.

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Thirty feet below him the sand waited, white and smooth. But at that depth the water was hard as iron; its pressure, taken suddenly, could burst the bubble of a man's skull and crush his brains to soup.

Step. Another step. Only a few feet ahead now, the bulwark began again. The old man leaned his weight on the line and felt his way towards it. Step.

The line parted. Manuel sank face downward to the deck and began to slide. The treacherous line came loose with a rush, tumbling and coiling about him like a live thing. He clawed at the deck with his gloved hands, scrabbling for a bolthead or anything to which he might cling, but there was nothing. His hands rasped over barnacles; he felt the gloves give and the sting of his cut palms, numbed at once by the cold water. His torn fingers dug vainly at the knife-sharp shells, as with the slow majesty of all motion under water he slid towards the gap in the bulwark.

In his mind, slipping one over the other and yet each murderously clear, a thousand images took shape. Pablo, his eldest son, the one best forgotten. Pablo, killed on a salvage job, killed while robbing the sea's graves, killed by the squeeze while hunting treasure. Pablo as Manuel had seen him last, when they hauled him up after the squeeze had caught him, and started to dig him out of his helmet, a pudding of shredded red flesh and bright jagged bone.

Manuel rolled off the deck, began to fall clear towards the flickering sand. Pressure gripped him. His right ear clogged. Then the roar of the air split with a crash and he heard nothing more; the pain in his ear was like a driven nail. His feet were being crushed; his knee joints were on fire. Blind and groping, he felt for the air valve, found it under his hand and wrenched at it with the last of his strength.

Blessed sweet air rushed in around him. His fall slowed, the pain in his legs slackened. His lamp, which had been pointing upward as he fell, now winked a reflection from a porthole by his side. Manuel felt the inrush of air catch him like a gentle hand, buoy him up, let him breathe again in the dead quiet of shattered eardrums.

Softly, so light he seemed to float in a dream, he settled to the bottom beside the dark hull of the ship. Through the bones of his head he felt the thunder of air from his exhaust valve as he opened it a little more. A salty taste on his tongue was blood; he licked it up.

One hand in its slashed glove felt upward to his helmet, to the tiny silver crucifix he had soldered there so many years before. "Eh," said Manuel aloud, hearing nothing, "is the sea so deep that the good Lord cannot come?"

The current died down. The Eel stopped pulling at his rib cage,

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at his thighs; it licked once snakily at his ankles and was still. Manuel freed himself from the coil of rotted rope that had fallen with him and signalled to be raised; as he was drawn above the wreck he caught the guide line, signalled again, and had himself lowered to the deck once more.

This time, with the Eel quiet, he had no trouble reaching the hatch. It was a pit opening into bottomless blackness, even under the beam of the lamp; Juanito's heavy line trailed into it. A kink had wedged it in a corner of the hatch. Manuel freed it, swung it clear, gave his own life line two slow tugs and swung off into the pit.

Sand drifted in the water around him and rose in hazy swirls about his helmet in the lamp glow. The wreck was full of it. At last his feet struck the firm, sand-strewn surface of the lower deck, and there in the lamp glow was a tiny door, the door of the treasure room. The *señorito* with his diagram was right after all.

But where was the boy? The end of the manilla cable lay coiled at Manuel's feet. The treasure-room door was shut tightly, but from its handle hung a frayed end of thin lashing twine. Juanito. Juanito.

"Idiot," said Manuel, but whether aloud or only in his mind he could not be sure in the silence. "He made fast the open door with that, thinking it would hold against the Eel. But the Eel came and slammed the door on him."

How long could a man live in a pressure suit, on bottled oxygen, cut off behind a closed door? Manuel set down his lamp, unscrewed his diving knife from its sheath and cut the twine which held a wrench to his belt. With stiff fingers he tightened the wrench on the door handle, braced one lead boot against the bulkhead beside it, and heaved. He felt his joints crack with the effort and prayed that the handle would hold. The exertion at such a depth made his heart rumble, and he paused, leaning on the wrench handle, gathering strength to try it again. The second time he resolved to tear his back muscles loose or get the door open, and then, with a suck of water, he felt it give outward. Pressing the door back, he tightened the wrench's jaws on a stanchion in such a way that its handle wedged the door open.

Manuel knelt on the deck, reaching for his lamp, and stayed that way for a minute. The blood was throbbing in his throat. At last he stood up and threw the lamp's beam into the strong room.

As he flashed his lamp into the vault, a hundred glints sprang up, chasing one another over walls and ceiling; prismatic colours, blue and red and golden, like fugitive jewelled fish. They sent spears of pure colour through the water, dazzling him. He blinked—was it the blood pounding at his temples?—and focused his eyes. There it lay, bulbous and shining and motionless, with brilliant spots of blue

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and red glancing over its steel; the boiler with legs. Five feet of hemp line trailed from its top ring to the door, which, closing under the resistless pressure of the Eel, had cut the heavy manilla like a strand of seaweed. Beyond the steel suit lay an open box; it was from there the rainbow lights sprang up, fanning out over the dark vault.

Old Manuel shone his lamp through one of the quartz windows of the giant shell. Within, Juanito lay, as if asleep; he had drawn his arms from the cumbersome sleeves and had one of them crooked over his eyes now, like a little boy in bed. The old man pressed his face plate against the thick window and shouted, feeling the sound strain his throat, "Juanito! Son! Wake up! Let's go home!"

In the misty shadows inside the armour the lad did not move. Fear rose around Manuel's heart, and then, like fear, came chilly water, creeping up around his knees inside his suit. When he bent over he had taken in water through his exhaust valve. He straightened up painfully; the chill was beginning to cramp him.

Stepping through the doorway, he seized the loose end of Juanito's line and carried it back with him. He picked up the end still fast to the ring of the pressure suit and joined the two again, his numb fingers working painfully, slowly. Then he plodded out directly under the hatchway, held his own lines clear, tugged twice, paused, and tugged four times more.

The heavy line twisted under his hand. Slowly the steel monster which held his son came to its feet, slowly it floated clear of the vault, passed him, arms stuck out stiffly, and vanished above him in darkness. *Go with God, Juanito, my son, dead or alive. We shall meet again when they pull me up, alive or dead.*

Manuel turned back into the vault with his light, and again the rainbow glitters leaped up. The treasure chest had been wrenched open; there were bright scratches around its lock, and a wrecking bar lay beside it. But where did the boy think he could hide stolen jewels, sealed up as he was? Manuel stared at the jumbled heap in the box—gold coins, gold chains, rings, strings of pearl, stones winking evilly red and green. Who knew how many murders had been done for them before they came to rest here?

He flashed his lamp around the strong room. A glance showed him a tall cabinet in the corner with one of its drawers open; so that was it. Stumping over to it, the old diver reached in a fist and pulled a glinting handful from the mass of water-soaked papers. Juanito, the fool. Planning to come back in their own boat after the *señorito* had gone. For this handful of trash, to let the Eel trap him, and then to faint with fear when the pressure fouled his fine modern self-contained underwater lamp, and left him in darkness with the jewels.

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Manuel kicked the water-filled lamp where it lay in the angle of the deck and the bulkhead. *The young idiot with the white, even teeth of his mother. Fool with the black curls. Young rascal who is all my heart.*

He pressed his handful of wealth back into the treasure chest, then stood looking down, tempted to leave it where it belonged, with the dead. But Don Francisco was up above, hungering for it; and a man must have something to love, if only *pesetas* in the bank. How to explain the broken lock? Easy enough: one had to force it open to make sure it was the right box. But it was too cumbersome to carry, and there was nothing to haul it up with, nothing.

There was the cord of his lamp. Manuel secured the hasps of the lid, grinning wryly, with heavy gold chains from the treasure itself; soft stuff, but good enough to be useful for once. Then he drew in the slack of his lamp line, passed a bight of it through one of the handles of the chest, and made it fast with a couple of hitches. He signalled for the lamp to be raised, and felt the vibration through his shoes as the chest began to grate along the sand-strewn deck.

Would the cord hold? He guided the chest with his hands until it was directly under the open hatches, testing the pull. Yes, it might hold. The lamp, burning still as it rose above him, made a spot of orange light disappearing through the hatches; smaller, only a glow now. Then there was nothing anywhere but blackness. Blackness to find his way up in.

He gave the chest time to be drawn clear, then signalled on his life line. In a moment he felt the tug around his waist. There was no line to guide him down here; when his feet left the deck, he swung with the roll of the *Golfin*, keeping his thoughts lashed tightly to the present moment.

Unless they were pulling him up too fast, he should be through the first hatch by this time, up towards the upper deck in blackness.

The Eel had lain quiet while he worked with the treasure, but now she had turned again; he felt her wash bits of broken furniture, floating chairs, against him as he swayed aloft. A pulpy mass that clung against his hand revealed itself to his groping as a water-sodden book; he shook it free.

Give thanks to the Eel, who slammed a door and kept my son from becoming a thief. Thanks to our mother, the sea, who allowed an old man in an old suit to come down so far—farther than the young ones dare—and now lets him go safely, with only the pain of his split ear-drum and the pain of his barnacle-slashed hands to remind him of her kiss.

Up towards the hurricane-deck hatch, twisting on his lines and kicking with his feet as he swayed through the dark water. Then his helmet struck something with an agonizing crash. Blinking pain away from his mind, Manuel put up his hands to feel a cold roof over

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his head. The Eel had sucked him deeper in between decks.

Twisting, he let air from his suit to give himself more weight, and sank away from the ceiling, feeling for his lines to keep them free. They came readily for a moment, then caught. He tugged blindly, but could get no farther. His lines were fouled; he had no light; he was trapped between decks, and there was no one to come down for him.

Well, said Manuel, moving his lips soundlessly, *I have done what I came for. I have got the boy, I have got the boy.* Exhaustion was blurring his thoughts. He did not feel like making the effort to touch his crucifix, but he sent it a friendly thought, and then thought: *Juanito.*

His foot in its lead boot crashed against some bulkhead, black in the black water, and the sudden pain cleared his head. Purely by reflex from the pain, he doubled over and kicked himself violently backward. He felt the fouled lines come loose from whatever had caught them and swing after him. He had done something to his ankle; its throbbing struck through the sleepy, numbing chill of the water and kept his head clear. Then, overhead, faintly outlined in grey light, was the open hatch.

On deck he turned, holding his lines, and walked backward, leaning against the current, until he reached the guide line and threw his arm about it, signalling that he had made it; they could hoist away. Ninety feet upwards he felt the water stop tearing down through his fingers. First stop for decompression. The surface was still hours away.

Four hours after Manuel left the deck of the *Tobermory*, he came over the side of the *Golfin*, staggering with fatigue. The sky was dark overhead; a searchlight beamed at them from the bridge, giving the sailors light to get his suit off him; he sank down on the dressing bench and his eyes closed. He felt the helmet twist; a quarter turn and the old copper helmet came free; wind pressed, sweet and salty, in the old man's face. He blinked, adjusting his eyes to the light. All was silence. He saw his weighted belt strike the deck without a clang and saw the mouths of the dressers fluttering, but making no sound. And Juanito; Juanito was everywhere, helping them strip off the heavy sleeves, bounding away and returning with hot blankets, with a bottle of brandy, his mouth fluttering and noiseless. Eh, one did not have to be a lip reader to know it meant love and gratitude. He smiled at the boy, and the answering smile, though it still had its bravado, had the grace to be a little shamefaced, too.

Abruptly, the *señorito*, Don Francisco, was there; he was babbling, he was transformed, and though Manuel shook his head and pointed to his ear, the man went on babbling. One would have

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said there were tears in his eyes, and in his hand was a small bundle, wrapped in one of his linen handkerchiefs with the monogram in the corner. Now, bracing himself against the roll of the ship, Don Francisco opened the bundle so Manuel could see : gold chains and rings, and here and there an unset stone winking green or red. The *señorito* caught Manuel's torn hand, making the old man wince, and pressed the handful of treasure into it.

The old diver looked down incuriously at his reward, thinking in terms of a new pump and perhaps a recompression chamber, so that . . . Glancing up, he caught the look on Juanito's face. It was no longer the face of a boy. The intent eyes, the lips drawn back over the white teeth as if in thirst . . .

Don Francisco was still chattering something. Manuel raised a weary, gnarled hand to stop the torrent of words.

" It was not for this I went down, Don Francisco," he said. " Let the dead men have it ; it is not good for the living." He tossed the handful over the side ; it spun in the air, glittered in the harsh beam of the searchlight, splashed on the face of a wave and was gone.

" Put us aboard our own boat, Don Francisco," the old man said, his hand tugging roughly at Juanito's black curls. " I have my treasure."

* * *

NO RISKS

A distinguished archæologist was . . . engaged in excavating for my father the problematic site of the Norman Manor of Eckington . . .

While at Renishaw, this learned man was afflicted with a return of malaria, from which he suffered, having contracted it in the East during the war. When I went to tell my father that his guest was indisposed and would be obliged to stay upstairs for dinner, I found him in bed resting. I ended with the words, " I only hope he's not dangerously ill. It's *malaria* ! "

The reaction was immediate. Plainly my father was taking no risks. Almost before I had finished speaking, he had whisked out of bed and rung the bell, and when it was answered he said curtly, " Robins, bring me my mosquito-net ! " Thereafter for a month he slept under it.

OSBERT SITWELL, *Laughter in the Next Room*

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THE BLACKBIRD

He was so full of vanity

by LIAM O'FLAHERTY

HE was standing on the top of a stone fence singing as loud as he could. He was trying to drown the harsh babble of the sparrows that were perched in the ivy that grew on the face of the tiny cliff behind him. On three sides the tiny cliff encircled him, making a green sloping grassy valley about him and in front of him. Beyond the valley stretched a wide plain.

With his beak in the air and his throat swelling with sound he poured out his voice over the valley. The shrill chirping of the sparrows grated on his ears as it came from behind him in a confused babble. But he rejoiced, for his own delicious warble re-echoed again and again, high above every other sound in the valley. When the echo of his voice came back to him, with its loudness silvered into an enchanting softness by the creviced cliffs, he became so drunk with pride that he swayed on his slender legs and made his wing feathers flutter. He shut his eyes and bent forward his beak again and again to sing with greater strength. It seemed to him that his throat would melt.

The sun had set. The blue twilight was darkening in the valley. It was time for him to be asleep. But he sang on, drunk with pride. So intent was he on his song that he never noticed the sudden silence that fell on all the birds that had been singing, chirping and twittering behind him. Silence came suddenly except for the nervous questioning, protracted whisper of a robin that hopped from stone to stone in the little rocky field beneath the cliff, thrusting out his breast defiantly with each hop. The ivy on the cliff face had been a moment ago alive with sound, and the ivy leaves had been shaking and fluttering as birds rushed hither and thither through them. Now the ivy was still. Not a bird moved. But the blackbird standing on the fence sang on.

A cat had entered the valley. He came over the brow of the little cliff, scrambled noiselessly down a crevice that was covered with moss and trotted swiftly along under the cliff until the birds stopped singing and chirping. As soon as their voices stopped the cat halted. He stopped dead with his right fore paw raised,

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his long black body half hidden in a hummock of grass he was passing through, his big eyes already gleaming in the half darkness. Then he began slowly to tip the grass around him with his snout as if he were going to eat it. He curled his tail up under him. He lay down slowly on his stomach, just for one moment, and then with a fierce flashing of his eyes, he took a short rush forward close to the earth. He saw the blackbird singing on the fence that stretched across his path in front.

The rush brought him as far as the fence where it ended in the cliff. Carefully planting paw after paw on the stones, and shaking each paw as he raised it to climb farther, he mounted the fence until he reached the top with his head. His large round whiskered head appeared over the top of the fence and began to roll around with an awful slowness. Again his eyes reached the blackbird singing on his right, ten yards in front of him. His eyes blinked and he made a little bored movement with his head from side to side as if he were heaving a sigh. He licked his paw. Then with a sudden and amazing spring he drew his body noiselessly to the top of the fence and rushed along it for five yards with his tail outstretched, his eyes blazing with an intense ferocity. The robin set up a piercing cry. The cat stopped dead.

The blackbird, conscious of the silence behind him, was full of vanity. He thought that he had overcome the sparrows and that they were listening in rapturous silence to his delicious warbling. He heard the robin shriek and he thought that the warning shriek was a cry of jealous rage. He shook himself and let all the feathers on his dun body sway with the light breeze that came up from the valley across his round breast. Then pushing his head backwards until his neck was almost joined with his back he broke out into another peal. The cat began to smell the little patch of blackened moss that grew on a stone in front of him on the fence.

Then there was silence for several moments. The robin had suddenly taken fright and flew southwards into the darkness that seemed to hang in the distance. The blackbird was listening to the answering call of his own voice coming back to him. The cat crouched down very low with his head moving from side to side in an apologetic manner, the light breeze making little whitish ridges through the dark fur on his back. Then he moved forward again.

He moved forward just as the blackbird broke once more into song. His long black body, moving sinuously along the pointed grey stones, looked ghoulish. The rippling notes coming from the blackbird's full throat rose in a wild peal of joy as the cat stole nearer inch by inch until at last he was within striking distance. He measured the round dun body of the blackbird with his eyes,

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and he raised his right fore paw carefully to thrust it forward to a little round stone whence he intended to spring. His body shivered and then it stretched out. The right fore paw landed on the round stone and . . .

Just then a gust of wind struck the blackbird sideways and made him shiver. It was the first gust of the night wind. It filled him with cold and with the sudden realization that he was making a fool of himself singing out there in complete darkness when all the other birds were gone to bed. Suddenly he thought that the silence was on account of the darkness having fallen and not on account of his wonderful music. He was filled with disgust and, uttering three loud peals of bravado, he rose from the fence just as the cat plunged forward to grasp him. A claw landed in his tail and three little feathers fluttered behind as he flew away, his heart panting with fright, afraid to look behind him.

Behind him the cat lay at the foot of the fence, where he had fallen after his fruitless plunge. His head was turned sideways, he was half fallen on his haunches and he was growling savagely. The sparrows began to twitter in the ivy.

* * *

NATIONAL PASSION

Queueing is the national passion of an otherwise dispassionate race.

On the Continent, if people are waiting at a bus-stop they loiter around in a seemingly vague fashion. When the bus arrives they make a dash for it; most of them leave by the bus and a lucky minority is taken away by an elegant black ambulance car. An Englishman, even if he is alone, forms an orderly queue of one.

The biggest and most attractive advertisements in front of cinemas tell people: Queue here for 4/6; Queue here for 9/3; Queue here for 16/8 (inclusive of tax). Those cinemas which do not put out these queueing signs do not do good business at all.

At week-ends an Englishman queues up at the bus-stop, travels out to Richmond, queues up for a boat, then queues up for tea, then queues up for ice cream, then joins a few more odd queues just for the sake of the fun of it, then queues up at the bus-stop and has the time of his life.

Many English families spend lovely evenings at home just by queueing up for a few hours, and the parents are very sad when the children leave them and queue up for going to bed.

GEORGE MIKES, *How to be an Alien*

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ODDLY ENOUGH

Mathematically speaking, everything seems . . .

If we square a lump of pemmican
And cube a pot of tea,
Divide a musk ox by the span
From noon to half-past three ;
If we calculate the Eskimo
By solar parallax,
Divide the sextant by a floe
And multiply the cracks
By nth-powered igloos, we may prove
All correlated facts.

If we multiply the Arctic night
By X times ox times moose,
And build an igloo on the site
Of its hypotenuse ;
If we circumscribe an arc about
An Arctic dog and weigh
A segment of it, every doubt
Is made as clear as day.
We also get the price of ice
F.O.B. Baffin's Bay.

If we amplify the Arctic breeze
By logarithmic signs,
And run through the isosceles
Imaginary lines,
We find that twice the half of one
Is equal to the whole.
Which, when the calculus is done,
Quite demonstrates the Pole.
It also gives its length and breadth
And what's the price of coal.

J. W. FOLEY

Double Dutch

To such an extent do paradoxes prevail in Holland, that even the *cows' tails*, in other countries proverbial for growing downwards, and descending in the world as they advance in age, here grow upwards : for, with the view of promoting the cleanliness of the

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animal while in the stall, the tail is tied up to a ring in the roof of the stable. This may be seen in Broek and elsewhere in Holland.

Murray's Guide

And the eccentrics . . .

There lived an old man in the kingdom of Tess,
Who invented a purely original dress ;
And when it was perfectly made and complete,
He opened the door and walked into the street.

By way of a hat he'd a loaf of Brown Bread,
In the middle of which he inserted his head ;
His Shirt was made up of no end of Dead Mice,
The warmth of whose skins was quite fluffy and nice ;
His Drawers were of Rabbit-skins, so were his Shoes,
His Stockings were skins, but it is not known whose ;
His Waistcoat and Trowsers were made of Pork Chops ;
His Buttons were Jujubes and Chocolate Drops.
His Coat was all Pancakes with Jam for a border,
And his girdle of Biscuits to keep it in order.
And he wore over all, as a screen from bad weather,
A Cloak of green Cabbage leaves stitched altogether.

EDWARD LEAR, 1812-1888

Have it all—

In India, eastward of the river Ganges, there is a nation called the Astomes, for they have no mouths: they live only by the aire, and smelling of sweet odours, which they draw in at their nose-thrills. No meat nor drink they take, onely pleasant savours from divers and sundrie roots, flowers, and wild fruits, growing in the woods; and those they use to carry about with them when they take any farre journey, because they would not misse their smelling. And yet if the scent be any thing strong and stinking, they are soone therewith overcome, and die withal.

PLINY THE ELDER,
Natural History, translated by PHILEMON HOLLAND, 1601

—their own way

Lord Bute, when young, possessed a very handsome Person, of which Advantage he was not insensible ; and he used to pass many Hours every Day, his Enemies asserted, in contemplating the Symmetry of his own Legs.

SIR NATHANIEL WRAXALL, *Historical Memoirs*, 1836

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Yet—

Why is it, when I am in Rome
I'd give an eye to be at home,
But when on native earth I be,
My soul is sick for Italy?

And why with you, my love, my lord,
Am I spectacularly bored,
Yet do you up and leave me—then
I scream to have you back again?

DOROTHY PARKER

We suppose that someone—

When I was a boy a charme was used for (I think) keeping away evill spirits; which was to say thrice in a breath,

Three blew Beanes in a blew bladder,
Rattle, bladder, rattle.

JOHN AUBREY, 1626-1697

Knows the solution!

i met a toad
the other day by the name
of warty bliggens
he was sitting under
a toadstool
he explained that when the cosmos
was created
that toadstool was especially . . .
thought out and prepared
for him . . .
conversation revealed
that warty bliggens
considers himself to be
the centre of the universe
the earth exists
to grow toadstools for him
to sit under
the sun to give him light
and wheeling constellations
to make beautiful
the night for the sake of
warty bliggens

don marquis, *archy and mehitabel*

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THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

A vision, it might be, granted her in comfort

by NINA CONARAIN

IT was night already in the Diranes' almost windowless little house, though dusk still lingered in the high, far sky above the hills. Margaret Dirane pounded potatoes for the children's supper, banging the pestle up and down in the smoky pot which she had put straight from the fire on to the bare deal table; knowing it would make an ugly mark on the newly scrubbed wood and too tired to care.

Paudy was watching her, his fair head level with the table edge, so that his little face was all she could see of him; like a pink and white water lily floating in the dusky half light that came from the smouldering turf on the hearth. Baba, who wasn't the baby of the family any more and would have to find another name, sat under the table sucking his fists to ease his hunger. The little one in the box-cradle down by the fire wasn't a month old yet, and no trouble at all, God bless her!

Glancing at the small puckered creature in its nest of shawls, Margaret Dirane's hollowed-out, exhausted eyes were gentle with love, though the next instant the sight of Sean filled them with hard impatience. There he was lounging on the wide stone hob of the hearth, his hand laid on the cradle's side, letting on to be rocking the baby, only that he had fallen into a trance, watching the sparks flying up out of the kindling turf. Just sitting there waiting for his supper to be handed to him; not even offering to light the lamp for her. But wasn't that a man all over, thinking the day's work was over when he came in from the fields with the setting of the sun!

Slapping a portion of the mashed potato on to a saucer with angry energy, she pushed it along the table to Paudy. Then filling a second saucer she lifted Baba on to her lap and began to spoon the food into his wet eager little mouth. It was very quiet all at once in the firelit room without the clatter of the pounding pestle, nothing now but the small sucking sounds the children made eating their supper, the satisfied grunts from Baba and the smacking of his lips.

Beyond the open door the mountains could be seen lifted dark and strong against the fading western sky. The bogland running down from the heights to the curving valley lay desolate as the day

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God made it. No house or tillage eased the wide loneliness. Boulders of granite and limestone shone white in the deepening night; the cold and savage stones everywhere; a landscape chaotic as the world's beginning, desolate as the world's end. In the windless evening the silence of the valley was absolute, an immense and brooding stillness to fill the heart with awe; so that the persistent lowing of a distant cow seemed timid and pitiful, the querulous voice of life lifted in soft complaint against that implacable emptiness.

"Is it deaf you are, Sean?" Margaret Dirane cried out in sudden irritation. "Or is it that you are waiting for me to do the milking on top of all else I have to busy me? Stir yourself, man, and go out to that cow before her lamentations drive us mad!"

With a sigh Sean Dirane came out of his trance. Rising from the fireside seat he took the milking can from its nail on the wall, his thin, finely-boned face still rapt in deep abstraction that might have come from profound thought, or merely from intense fatigue. Not looking at his wife, not answering her, like a man in a dream, he moved heavily across the earthen floor and out through the door.

As though aware of his withdrawal the infant in the cradle set up a sharp and outraged wail. With a clucking of exasperation Margaret bounced Baba from her lap to hurry to the little one and Baba, too, began to cry. Now the dark room seemed to be filled with a pandemonium of childish weeping, and with the soothing hushes of the mother, so that it was easy for Paudy, quick as a trout in the shallows, to slip after his father unheeded.

"Dada!" he called, running on his soft bare feet across the yard, but Sean did not turn to answer him.

With bowed head he climbed the stony track leading out of the yard into the limitless twilight, the child pattering unnoticed behind him. The cow, enclosed in a small field surrounded by high stone walls, had ceased its calling, as though listening to their approach. Halting when his Father halted, Paudy watched the removal of the cut furze bush which blocked the entry to the field and a sly secret feeling came over him, so that he shrank back into the shadow of a clump of nettles, letting his Father pass into the field still unaware of him. He saw the furze bush replaced in the gap shutting him out, then he moved on, keeping to the mounting track that skirted the high wall of the field. He could hear the little cry of joy with which the cow greeted the milker, then the swish, swish of the milk rattling into the empty pail.

A gurgle of laughter ran up into his throat as he hurried on, and his heart began to beat fast, as though he were escaping from hands stretched out to pull him back to the dull little house with its confining walls and wailing children. Out here the queer half-darkness

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was like a warm sea, bearing him on, so that he went lightly, deliciously, without thought. He could smell wild mint and meadow-sweet and the rank pungent breath of the wet bog grasses. A night smell that made him feel wild and brave. He strutted comically, lifting his feet high, and slapping them down fiercely on the flat limestone slabs which still held the heat of the day's sunshine.

A mountain sheep with a black face lay to one side of his path, its feet folded under it, its narrow jaws chewing. The eyes in the sheep's head were cold and yellow, watching him fearfully as he approached.

The look of fear excited Paudy. "Hoi!" he shouted, clapping his hands. The sheep started up and ran from him and chasing after it he was all-powerful. Away from the path he pelted and over the rough tickling heather, pursuing the sheep without mercy until the gathering darkness hid it from him; but it seemed to him that it was his own valour which had caused the animal to vanish and he marched on, waving his arms above his head in triumph.

Now he lifted his face to the strangely shining sky behind the black mountains and he could see himself striding over the world until he had reached the highest peak imaginable. His heart seemed to burst with courage and defiance as he climbed the steep rough land, his eyes fixed on the shining sky.

A longing to assert himself in the engulfing silence came over him, and he began to shout the few little words he knew. *Mama. Dada. Baba-bab.* In spite of his three years, he was still unable to speak clearly, perhaps because neither of his parents had time to encourage his efforts; for he was not backward in any other way and had the lonely air of independence to be found in children thrown too early upon their own resources. He was tall for his age, a long-legged, thin little boy with the same beauty of bone as his father. His hair was thick and golden, fine as spun silk on his head, and his blue eyes held the fierce, withdrawn look of a wild creature.

But now in the floating summer darkness all that he was was blotted out and in his pale homespun flannel frock with the long legs coming out of it, he might have been a young goat or a lost lamb, leaping mindlessly through the sea of scrub, making his way ever higher and higher until the valley was black beneath him.

He climbed until he was tired and his wild elation had faded, until the last of the day had gone from the west and the glimmer of the midsummer night settled upon the earth. Grey shapes of bush and rock loomed up to meet him, vanishing even as he peered at them. His senses became acutely alert and he could hear the tiny droning flight of insects, the far-off trickle of a stream, the little stir of a weasel in the tangled heather that lay springy and rough beneath his feet. Now a dark shape came silently gliding, the beating of soundless

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wings fanning his cheeks. Fear crawled in his stomach and when the cry of the captured weasel rang out, he stood rigid as a hunted hare, his flesh quivering. For the first time he knew he was alone and small in the wide night. "Mama," he called in a quavering voice. "*Mama!*"

Suddenly a terrific panic possessed him and turning he began to run down the hill he had climbed in such high heart; stumbling at times and rising to run again, stubbing his bare toes on the loose stones without feeling the pain of impact.

Now there was nothing in the world but his terror and his madly beating heart. When his feet sank into the engulfing slime of a morass he resisted the deadly suction without any consciousness of its danger, his groping hands feeling for home, for safety, for his Mother's woollen comforting skirts.

The effort with which he pulled his light weight free was mindless, lost in the overwhelming urge which sent him on, running again without pause, though it may have been some instinctive awareness of the death he had so narrowly escaped which caused him at this point to choose the solidity of the rising sheep track that took him to a roughly paved boreen.

There were sheltering walls here, shutting out the wide night, thick bushes starred with blackberry blossom and the big limestone crags all glimmering and white making a path that led to home. The belief that he would see the shape of his own house rising square and safe before him filled his poor little whirling mind, saving him from despair too great to be endured. Faith born of the need for faith. He did not know his spirit had reached out to grasp the fabulous torch by which men make their stumbling way.

Frantic with hope he ran until he could run no more, until the blood roared in his ears and his breath came whistling through his chest, causing him an anguish so great that it blotted out even his fear. With the perfume of honeysuckle washing around him he stood still, swaying on his long legs, his eyes lifted blindly to the wheeling heartless stars. Little puffs of air moved mysteriously, the rich warm scent of the honeysuckle bush like kindly, gentle hands touching his face, gathering him in. When he crawled into the dry ditch in the shelter of the bush, he would feel his lids drooping; his aching body seemed to melt into the ground and as the tearing pain in his chest eased he fell into a deep and sudden sleep.

It was an old grey donkey who wakened him, her snout nuzzling his shoulder, her snort of breath a moist blast in his ear. Coming out of sleep with no recollection of his plight, he was not afraid. But when he put up his hand to touch the hairy face bent over him, the donkey started in alarm and backed out of the ditch. Anxiety piercing him once more, Paudy scrambled after her, the dull ache of

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his trouble waiting for him in the bewilderment of returning consciousness.

Now he fixed his whole attention on the donkey, finding reassurance in the clatter of her little hoofs on the stony path. Her breathings and shufflings robbed the night of its menacing silence. As she moved along the lane before him the swaying of her pale haunches seemed to him the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. She was the one living creature in the dark, inanimate void, and he was careful not to take his eyes off her.

When she stopped to snatch at the sedgy grass by the way he stopped also, waiting until she was ready to move again. Now and then she tossed her head, vaguely disturbed by the presence of the following child, imagining herself to be driven. When after a while she broke into an impatient trot in an endeavour to shake him off, Paudy trotted too. Kicking up her heels, the donkey turned sharply, broke through the ragged hedge, leaving the lane to set off over an open stretch of ground at a gallop. Paudy followed, tearing his flannel dress on the thorny hedge, plunging into a bed of nettles, the stings burning his legs, bringing tears to his eyes. Shaking with sobs, he ran on, so angry with the donkey for deserting him that his head felt like a ball of fire.

He did not see the ravine ahead of him. He only knew that the donkey had abruptly and blessedly stopped in her wild careering and that together they halted above a yawning darkness; the two of them instinctively bracing their feet against that fatal descent.

Then slowly and carefully the donkey backed her way to safer ground and began to amble quietly along the ravine's edge. This was her way home and that the child was driving her there had now become a certainty in her mind. Resisting him no longer, she went meekly before him, finding the familiar track of her nightly wanderings, a sloping declivity that took them to the bottom of the ravine and by devious windings up again on the other side.

When she came to the neatly walled yard she pushed the gate with her head and Paudy saw the squat white farmhouse before him, the high stack of turf built up at the gable end. There was a window filled with light which streamed out upon the wondering face of the little boy. "Mama!" he whispered. "*Mama!*" Then with a cry he ran forward and began to beat with his fists against the door.

In the kitchen behind the door Julia Carmody sat by the fire dozing in a smart upholstered armchair, set incongruously by the earthen hearth. The bright light flowing out of the uncurtained window came from an oil lamp with an incandescent burner, and little brass pipes to regulate the flow of the oil; the very latest things in lamps, if you had to burn anything as primitive as paraffin.

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There was a vase of paper flowers on the centre of the table, which was covered with a cloth of emerald green chenille. Gaudy rugs lay here and there on the beaten mud floor. A coloured magazine picture of the George Washington Bridge had been fastened to the whitewashed uneven stones of the wall with stamp paper. There was a postcard view of New York City propped against a statue of St. Joseph on the mantelshelf. On the floor, behind the chair in which Julia sat, a small portable radio set lay, its sides stove in, a heavy wooden milking stool rolled over beside it.

When she heard the scrabbling of the child's fists at the door, Julia stirred in her uneasy sleep and slowly opened her eyes, not knowing what had wakened her. Her lashes felt sticky with the tears she had shed and her head and her neck ached from the way she was cramped in the chair. The back of it, she thought, was too short for her; there was no real comfort in it, only style. She would have been better off stretched out on the bed only that she had been too uspet to take off her clothes and lie down.

The terrible things Bartly had said to her! And her own voice screaming on and on at him until he had lifted his fist and swept the radio from the dresser, and then, for fear it wouldn't be smashed outright, he had picked up the stool and beaten the whole contraption to a pulp. A long, dry, childish sob came up out of her breast, thinking about the smashed radio. But she had cried herself empty of tears over it and over the whole damned row just after Bartly stalked out of the house.

"Going down to the village dangling after Bridie O'Toole!" she had called out after him; and he had retorted with a quickness quite foreign to him, "Wouldn't I be better off with her!"

Maybe it was that remark, even more than the loss of the radio, which had made her weep until she was sick and sore. Something passionate and anguished and terrible ringing out in his voice as he went away into the dark night. Even now, half asleep though she was, Julia shrank from the memory, but its bitterness stirred her nerves to wakefulness and there was no use pretending to herself that she could rest any more.

Glancing at the tin alarm clock beside St. Joseph, she saw that it was two o'clock. Bartly had never stayed out as late as this before. Maybe she oughtn't to have talked about the way he had grabbed at her fortune to stock the farm, grudging her the armchair and the few little mats and the radio. But wasn't it true? Two bright spots of indignation burned in her loose pasty cheeks as she leaned over to pull the scattered sods of half burned turf together on the hearth. Then she heard the scrabbling at the door again and the tongs dropped from her hand.

At first she thought it was Bartly—drunk and groping for the

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latch and all the softness of her weeping was gone, a cold bright rage filling her heart. Standing there waiting for him to come stumbling into the room, she was ready to start the quarrel over again, panting to start it, all the bitter things she would say crowding into her mind. But there was no sign of the door opening, only the queer little scratchings and a thin wailing that halted her breath in her throat. In God's name, what could it be!

A banshee . . . crying the dead. Once before she had heard the selfsame sound; the night her Mother was taken. "Jesus, Mary and Joseph!" she muttered, and her hand was shaking so much she could hardly bless herself. Bartly was dead, lying in some ditchful of water, face downward. A drunkard's drowning. And she had driven him to it.

Holy Mary! The queer scratchings again the other side of the door, like a fox or a dog, or a big wounded bird, beating its wings. And the strange dribble of weeping. The way a tired child would cry.

Bracing herself, Julia approached the door, her head bent sideways, listening, her breath held tight in her throat. "Is there anyone there?" she called out, forcing herself to speak boldly. But no sound came back to her; only the soft whimpering, and without giving herself time to dwell on the ghostly dangers she might be risking, she drew back the latch.

The child came in with a queer plodding gait, like an old man, not halting till he had reached the green table, his hands clasped against his breast, his face lifted blank and bewildered. In the strong white lamplight his fair hair seemed like the nimbus in a holy picture. Julia crossed herself once more and she could feel the strength oozing out of her legs as she closed the door and turned back to the child.

"Who are you?" she asked in a half whisper, but the child gave her no answer, his blue eyes fixed on her with all the sorrow of the world in their depths. The way Our Lady looked down at you from the altar at Craughmor in the side chapel. Oh, the very same look of heartbroken wisdom and gentle reproach! A terrible feeling of guilt came over Julia and she began to gabble an Act of Contrition: "*Oh, my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee . . . and I firmly resolve by Thy Holy Grace never more to offend Thee and to amend my life . . .*"

Tears filled her eyes. Her poor broken life . . . and her broken radio and the scorn in Bartly's voice going away into the night calling back at her that he would be as well off with Bridie O'Toole. Oh, she knew quite well what he meant, throwing that at her! And she knew, too, the meaning of the sly glances the women put on her and she coming from Mass on a Sunday. Eyeing her up and down. A woman four years married; and the whispers behind her back that it was because of the wicked life she led in New York that she

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was the way she was.

The stupid liars! If only they knew how much she despised them for their ignorance and filth; their houses running over with yelling, verminous brats, their bodies forever swollen with their endless childbearing. God knows, it was no sin for her to want to be different from the women of Craughmor.

"*Longing for a child of my own, lighting all those candles to Our Lady!*" She didn't know if she said it aloud, or only in her mind; only that she was kneeling now before the child with the fire of gold about his head, the blue eyes dark with truth, piercing her, making a lie of her grieving. Because maybe it wasn't a child she had wanted, but whatever it was that would please Bartly, keep him at her side. She had thought at first to dazzle him with her rayon stockings and high-heeled shoes, the smart bright-coloured dresses she had bought in New York; setting too much faith perhaps in her stylish tricks and the curls she put in her greying hair, the rouge and scented powders she used, her clever talk of life in a great city.

Maybe he'd found a kind of a charm in it all to begin with, but after a while the terrible hollowness that seemed to come over the two of them, their eyes shifting uneasily from the sight of one another, as though some secret sin lay between them!

It was then she began her daily visits to the altar in the side-chapel, lighting the candles before the blue-robed Mother with the Child in her arms. Oh, there was no one could say she hadn't tried everything a woman could try until she was worn out with the hard, cold worry of it. Watching Bartly until her nerves were in rags, and here she was maybe half crazed, with the ghost-child before her.

Her hand went without volition, her poor shaking hand, touching the pale homespun frock, finding its substance. A dress any child from Craughmor might wear, only that there was no child anywhere she remembered with this yellow-gold crown on its head, and no mortal child, it seemed to her, could have travelled at this hour the stark road that separated them from the life of the village; three miles of it flung bleak on the side of the black mountain and the stones sharp as the nails in the Holy Cross every step of the way.

It was with the nails in her bemused mind that she saw then the blood oozing from the child's feet and for a moment her heart halted so that she thought she must die. She covered her face with her hands and it seemed to her that the brightness of the child flowed even through the palms pressed against her eyes. She would never know what came over her after that for it was like waking from a dream, unless it was the sound of the short dry sob the child gave at the sight of her bowed head, and the words crying out of him, simple and earthly and filled with desolation. "Mama!" he moaned. "Mama!"

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And all at once there was nothing to him only that he was small and lonely standing there in the lamplight beside the green table, and her arms were around him, pressing him against her bosom. She could feel the poor sharp little bones of his body and the rigid way he kept himself, straining away from her in terror or distaste. "*Mama!*" he cried again, in protest this time, pushing her back from him with his two small hands.

"Who is your Mama, *agradh*? Where is she?" Julia asked, loosing her hold of him. He stood, staring at her, not answering; the desperate glittering look in his eyes, like a trapped animal. She felt her heart breaking for him, for whatever he was, mortal or wraith, there was a great distress on him, and he was half-dead with the weariness of his wanderings.

When she lifted him up and put him in the chair by the fire, he did not resist her, his bright head lolling like a flower on a broken stem. She brought water in a bowl to wash his scratched, torn feet, soothing him with foolish talk. Her little white bird, she called him, her heart's bright pulse; the sweet words strange on her tongue.

In her eagerness to please him and comfort him she found herself trembling. When she held the warm sugared milk to his lips and he turned away from it, she could have died with the disappointment. And it was queer then how simply it came to her, holding him on her lap in the crook of her arm, spooning the milk into his mouth. As though it were a thing she had been doing all her days.

When he began to suck the milk in with relish, a deep satisfaction came to her. She could feel his head growing heavier against her shoulder as he relaxed, comforted by the milk, and even before he had finished, he had fallen into the sudden sleep of exhaustion.

Closing her eyes, Julia rested her cheek against the silken warmth of the child's hair and a quietness fell on her heart. It was as though everything in her mind had become clear and easy, making her safe, and free from perplexity. Her thoughts began to drift gently, without resistance through the salty wilderness of her days; the queer life in New York, like the life of some other woman who was not herself at all, year after year in the basement of the dry-cleaning place, the pungent steam coming up from under the hot iron in her hand, evil as opium to dull her soul's revolt. And the pile of dollar bills growing ever thicker and thicker in the bag sewn into her stays.

She could think how she had lain with the bag pressed against her cheek in the hard ship's bunk on her homeward journey, imagining the fine husband she would get for herself with her savings. Some steady ageing small farmer, perhaps. She had never expected a wild firebrand of a lad like Bartly Carmody, nor dared to hope for the bright tide of desire which had turned her world to glory. And even that lost glory she could recall now without pain,

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remembering with the quietness in her heart the day she had first set eyes on Bartly..

The time of the big autumn cattle fair in Craughmor. There he was tall and proud as a king, so that with the whole market square crowded he was the only person you'd see in it. Standing by Finnigan's potato crane he was, talking to young Bridie O'Toole, who was one of a long poor family of daughters with no dowry coming to her. A settled woman with two hundred pounds in her hand would be a better match for any man.

Even with her looks and her youth Bridie hadn't a chance; some old man with his fortunes made was all she could hope for. Only that she hadn't got her old man yet. Hanging round Craughmor instead, making sheep's eyes at Bartly every time he passed down the road. And that, too, Julia could remember in strange detachment, lying back with the child's hard little skull pressed into her neck.

She could see the window whitening with a dawn that brought no sound of her husband's returning footsteps. But whether he came now or some other time didn't greatly matter. Nothing mattered only the drowsy comfort of the child in her arms; the queer feeling she had that this was the way it could always be for her now; this ease she couldn't put a name to, only that it was the answer to everything in her heart unanswered before.

Flesh or wraith, this child has put a spell on me, she thought. And when she carried him into the inner room she could see herself in the mirror she had hung on the wall for her powderings and paintings. Young and soft her face appeared beneath its raddle of rouge, the wear and tear of her years smoothed out. Julia Carmody in the old bit of mirror with a child in her arms . . . like a magic crystal fore-telling the future!

Laying the child on the bed she drew the covers about him. In the grey beginning of daylight he was no more than a shadow on the wide pillow, so that it was easy for her to see how he grew ever more shadowy—like a dream that would be fading.

And when I come in here again he will be no more, she thought, backing away to the door tranced in her foolish awe. With the full light of day he would be gone. For he was not of the day, but of the shadows, a vision, it might be, granted her in comfort, a sign from Heaven. Like the promise that came to Sarah and Hannah of old. Like holy Teresa's Seraph with the golden dart that pierced her heart with love. And going back to the kitchen to mend the fire and put the kettle on to boil, the ancient legend brimmed up in her heart so that it was like singing all about her.

The little lovely angel, so small you could lift him on your lap. And holy Teresa, seeing the blaze of light about him, thinking him to be some sweet and humble cherub God had loaned her in His pity

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for her loneliness—until her spiritual advisers told her that he was no cherub, but a Seraph of the highest degree; and after that they had called Teresa the Seraphic Mother.

Queer, the things that would come into a person's mind out of a night of sleepless sorrow! She picked up the smashed radio, hiding it in the dresser cupboard so that the sight of it wouldn't shame Bartly when he came in. There was no zest any more in the notion of shaming or annoying Bartly; for the new softness in her heart flowed out towards him, as though the secret joy that had come upon her was as much his concern as her own.

When she opened the house door the air of the morning tasted sweet on her lips. She saw in mild wonder that the old grey ass had come back from her nocturnal wanderings, without waiting to be rounded up. Doing the right thing of her own accord for once in her life. Often, indeed, it was the devil's own job to find her. "Who-sha!" she called to the donkey, urging it away from the one little bush of blossoming fuchsia that garnished the bare yard. Nothing would do that one, only a breakfast of flowers, she thought.

It was five by the tin alarm clock when she heard Bartly's step on the road and halting with the teapot in her hand, she could see like a ghost in the room the woman who might have waited for him, rigid and ugly with rage, her tongue heavy with the weight of abuse she was ready to pour out.

Maybe the same woman was in Bartly's mind, too, for he came in with a kind of arrogant cringing, his dark beautiful head flung back, his eyes storing up the fire of scorn with which he would burn up the jealous accusations he expected.

For a moment the two of them stood staring at one another, as though, robbed of the tirade that did not come, there was nothing they could find to say. Then in a deflated way Bartly threw his cap from off his head and rubbed his hand through his hair.

"I've had a hell of a night," he offered in something that might have been sullen apology. "Tramping the mountains with the lads of the town searching for Sean Dirane's child that strayed. The Guards are out after him now . . . but there is no sign of him. Sean is near out of his mind."

Julia Carmody drew in a long shaking breath. "He is here," she said on the end of that aching sigh, "asleep in the room beyond."

"He is here!" Bartly said after her, as though in the simple phrase there was something beyond comprehension.

"He came round about two o'clock, knocking at the door," Julia said, and he could see her lips stiff and shaking, letting the words out slowly as if with pain. Her eyes had a wild look, roving the room, as though she might be searching for something she had

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lost, not thinking about what she was saying to him.

" There was nothing to be got out of him," she said, " for he was too demented with the fright to speak. I had no way of finding out who he might be. I thought . . ." She stopped short, halted by the impossibility of finding words to convey all that she had thought through the strange, sweet night. Tears welled in her eyes, and she turned away, taking the teapot to the hearth, placing it in the glowing ashes of the fire to brew.

She was kneeling there with her back to him and the sob coming into her voice, saying, with a kind of pleading, " The Diranes ? But there is no one of that name in the township of Craughmor ? "

" In Lisscarragh they live," Bartly said, " the far side of Ben Carragh, beyond the bog of Liss."

There was sudden life in the way she raised herself from the hearth then, and a great wonder on her, saying very quietly, " He came up across the sinking bogs. He crossed the ravine. All in the dark night ! A child that age traversing in safety a stretch of land so wicked that it would daunt the heart of a grown man. How did he do it, Bartly ? How did he make it at all ? "

" God knows how he made it," Bartly answered impatiently. " But however he did it, he's here, and I'll have to go back to the barracks now and tell the Sergeant we have him. Come out and give me a hand with the ass. I'll yoke her to the cart and drive down, for my legs are stretched with the night's traipsing."

They went out into the filmy whiteness of the summer morning, and as they saddled the grey donkey, working in silence together, Bartly glanced curiously at his wife. Humble and sad she seemed, her head bent over the old ass. The hard smart way she always had with her was gone. Like a woman in a daze she was, gazing away to the violet wall of the hills.

" He was stained and torn from the thorns and the stones," she said, like one who would be talking to herself. " He was mud to the knees from wading in the dark sucking waters. It was the Angel of the Lord brought him through the night to me. It was the Angel of the Lord led him to this house ! " In the cold morning light her face was defenceless, and her eyes were bright. " All along I had the feeling of a miracle working about me," she said, her hand on the donkey's head. " I couldn't be wrong, Bartly. I knew I couldn't be wrong."

* * *

An inch of time on the sundial is of greater worth than twelve inches of jade.

Chinese Proverb

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A PORTRAIT REVERSED

"You are," said Malherbes, "like all artists, dishonourable"

by GEORGE BRADSHAW

IF you were driving along the coast road from Cannes to Monte Carlo, say, you would find nothing much to detain you in Trou-sur-mer. It has no casino, no great hotel, no chic *plage*: Only two very French bars, a number of utilitarian stores and one excellent restaurant which you would not see, as it is hidden in a cul-de-sac. But the place suited me. Trou-sur-mer was a quiet but by no means sleepy Riviera town. I found that I could rent a suitable pink house there, with a garden. And after not too many French delays, I moved in.

My neighbours treated me with friendly unconcern, and the tradespeople cheated me only so much as would show polite recognition that I was an American. I had a fairly set routine; I swam in the morning, had lunch, took a nap and then wrote during the late afternoon and night.

My first friend of any intimacy was the butcher, M. Biran. I dropped in occasionally to get our meat and so save my cook a trip down the hill. It appeared that some years before he had sold meat to Edith Wharton; she was a writer, she was an American; when he discovered I was not only an American but a writer, *and* a customer, the whole affair appeared to him as a considerable coincidence, and we had a certain amount of talk about it. Mrs. Wharton, I was given to understand however, had spent a good deal more on meat than I did.

I mention M. Biran because it was in his cool, dark shop one hot noonday that my relationship with Maurice Malherbes began.

I knew of course that Malherbes lived at Trou. He was as much the local monument as Picasso at Antibes, or Matisse at Vence. But so great was his fame that I had been too shy even to nod to him, although I saw him fairly often on the road which led past my house to his: if he was not the greatest modern painter, he was so near the top as to make differences negligible.

When I came into the butcher's shop this day, Malherbes was

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at the counter, arguing very rapidly with Biran. He was a big man, strong as apparently all good painters must be, almost bald, with a brown beard turning white.

Biran, it was clear, was displeased and adamant. In one hand he held a bill, with the other he kept pushing a small piece of paper with a drawing upon it towards Malherbes, who kept returning it.

Finally Malherbes shrugged. Biran then ripped a very large piece of the grey white paper which he used to wrap meat from its roll, smoothed it out on the marble counter and handed Malherbes a large black pencil. Malherbes made a few tentative circular motions in the air, and then proceeded to draw one of the most beautiful sketches of a centaur I have ever set eyes upon.

When he finished, Biran looked, nodded and then tore up the bill. Malherbes picked up a large package and left.

I said to Biran, " That is how he pays your bill, eh ? "

Biran nodded. " I am by way of being something of a patron of the arts," he said, " but I am not a fool. For two months not one cent, not one drawing, and now he tries to settle for so small a picture as you saw. This is better, eh ? "

I nodded. " You have many of his drawings ? " I said.

" Several," Biran said, and set about preparing the meat my cook had ordered.

I wanted that centaur, passionately. I have no greed for many things, but there are some pictures I can not control myself against. " I suppose," I said, " you never consider selling any of them."

" Occasionally," he said, " to people I know would appreciate. You understand ? "

I nodded.

" That one," Biran gestured towards his treasure, " is a something you could fall in love with."

" So," I said, " sell it to me before you fall in love with it."

Biran immediately lost interest. I saw I had made a mistake. So I left, and after that, day after day, we haggled. It was my cook, of course, who finally arranged the bargain. I am afraid she did it not so much for love of me as for love of talk. The picture and the deal provided a great topic. She was very happy and for one hundred dollars I got a picture which would have cost two thousand in any Manhattan gallery.

When Malherbes heard what had happened, he was furious. For whatever the opinion of the local citizenry, he knew perfectly well what his pictures were worth. By way of his cook and my cook, I heard how he cursed.

But suddenly one day he appeared all smiles in my garden. Would I please, would I be so kind, but the little centaur which he

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had sketched for M. Biran, it had a certain, well a certain stance—it is hard to explain these things, he said, to non-painters—which he found would be useful as a model in a picture he was now painting, in short he wanted to incorporate the centaur into a larger work, and would I permit that he take the centaur—for a few days only, of course—to his studio so he could copy, would I be so kind?

I was immediately suspicious. If once he got my centaur away, I felt sure I would never see it again. Yet, this famous man, I could not refuse him so simple a request. So I said, but of course, of course, however, would he do me one small, one infinitesimal favour.

He would.

I was, I said, such an ardent admirer of his work, that I could hardly bear the centaur out of my sight; would he, then, lend me one other picture to look at while he kept the centaur?

At this his face fell, but in a moment he narrowed his eyes and a smile appeared on his face. Yes, he would.

My fears were well founded, for every picture I selected had some mark against it: This one was sold, those were being sent to Paris to his dealer in the morning, that one was going to the framers, this was unfinished. He felt crestfallen, he did so want to live up to the bargain, but . . .

Malherbes shrugged. Obviously I was beaten.

Then just by chance I turned, and through a slightly opened door I saw—well, one of the famous paintings of the twentieth century, Malherbes' *Eagle with Skull*—a picture I had seen in a thousand reproductions. It had been painted ten years before, it was his I knew, and it was framed.

"I'll take that," I said.

Malherbes picked up the centaur, rolled it carefully, and threw it in my face. "Take it, take it, take it," he said, "I can draw a hundred pictures better than that. It is of no use to me, I do not need models, get out. Take it . . ."

Fortunately, I laughed. Fortunately, for in a moment Malherbes looked at me, and then he too began to laugh. He came and put his great arm on my shoulders, and we rocked together. He brought out a bottle of wine, we drank, I stayed to dinner, I looked at a hundred of his pictures he had hidden away, we talked, talked, talked, and finally when at midnight I rolled down to my house, I had in my hand my centaur, and written on it, in a somewhat unsteady hand, was "*Malherbes, a son ami.*"

Why, in the months that followed, we became friends, I cannot tell you, but we did. He liked to talk, I liked to listen; we were both passionately fond of eating; that was part of it, but more than that, we developed a genuine fondness for each other.

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So much so that when in November I had to go to Paris for a couple of weeks, he decided to come too, and took me to stay at his apartment in the Rue Grands-Augustins.

I was, therefore—and it is to this I have been leading up so long—concerned from the very beginning, and intimately concerned, with the affair, the scandal, whatever you want to call it, of Malherbes' paintings—for the story broke, you remember, on the eighteenth of November.

I was directly responsible for the beginning. The second day I was in Paris, I ran into, in Morgan's bank, a fellow I had known casually for years, a very rich man who was, like M. Biran the butcher, something of a patron of the arts. He and his wife owned a lot of pictures, invested in ballet, subsidized second-rate poets, and in general did a certain amount of good. I liked them well enough and they always had good food at their house. Therefore when, even after their rather too obvious surprise when I told them I was staying with Malherbes, they asked me to dinner, I accepted. As we parted, Lottie—Lottie Samuels—naturally said, " And bring the great man along, if you can."

Perhaps that " if you can" rankled, so I took Malherbes. The Samuels' apartment was one of those luxuries near the Rond Point, and we had, I must say, a dinner which even Malherbes was ecstatic about. Afterwards, rather dramatically, we were ushered along a hall to a drawing room we had not previously seen, the door was thrown open and there, over the mantel, in the place of honour, was a really fine Malherbes. Lottie turned, after we had all exclaimed properly, to Malherbes and asked rather coyly, " Aren't you going to say anything ? "

Malherbes looked blank. " What do you expect me to say ? "

" Well," Lottie said, " I thought it would please you to see anything so beautiful again."

Malherbes turned away. " I assure you, Madame," he said, " I have never seen that picture before in my life."

I think " commotion " is the only word to explain what occurred during the next half hour. The Samuels were appalled and more than that devastated. Ten thousand pounds' worth devastated. But the news, the unbelievable, electrifying news, was that this affair was no surprise to Malherbes.

" My dear people," he said, " I have known about the Malherbes forger for years. I walk along a street, and in a gallery window I will see a picture I might very well have painted—the subject, I mean—and it is signed with my name, but I have never seen it before. I have complained, certainly, but some dealers do not believe me ; some do not want to. What can I do ? The forger is a competent painter, he is not so good that I am ever envious of him, but he is

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clever. I have tried to trace him, but the pictures show up mostly from America or England.

"He does not paint as I do now, but in my style of fifteen or twenty years ago. I have not seen one for some time." He stopped and went over to the mantel. "Look," he said, "that picture is not more than two or three years old. You can tell by the paint. Yet I did the series like that eighteen years ago."

There was, of course, a vast amount more of conversation, but nothing more to the point. There it was. I gathered, when I exchanged a rather strained goodnight with Lottie, that I had not been an entirely successful guest. Dinner had cost her ten thousand pounds, plus food.

Something I should have mentioned before is this: There was, among the dozen people at dinner that night, a foreign correspondent named Edgar Wyndam. Apparently, before he went to bed, he cabled a detailed story to his paper in New York. Within two days the repercussions began.

For, of course, the interest in the story became world wide. In Buenos Aires, in Los Angeles, in Cleveland and London and Capetown there were museums and dealers and private collectors who owned Malherbes'. The old man, like all great painters, was prolific; there were hundreds of his canvases, and now over every one had been cast the shadow of a doubt. Reporters from every newspaper and every wire service in Paris crowded into the apartment on Rue Grands-Augustins. Do not be surprised at this concern over what would appear to be a special artistic matter. The press was interested not in its artistic but its financial aspect. Pictures, remember, are now about the only really liquid international currency.

Malherbes took the clamour good-naturedly, seemed even to be a little pleased with the stir he had caused, and he treated the reporters politely.

By the end of a week the thing happened which I suppose I should have expected: People began to bring their pictures to the apartment to have them judged. On the first day there were two, the next day five, and on the third, when Malherbes and I came home after a long lunch, there were eleven suspicious people sitting in his studio.

Of all the pictures Malherbes examined those first few days, not one was a fake. But a further sensation occurred when one of the French newsmen, who had kept on with the story, asked Malherbes, "Just where can one see a forgery?"

And Malherbes replied, "In the Luxembourg. The picture called *Yellow Arrangement* is not mine."

The reaction to this was curious. The amount of space devoted

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to this piece of news—in the Paris papers, at least—was more than had been given to the original story of the forgeries. The Directors of the Luxembourg Museum were by turn haughty and hurt, but there was really nothing very much they could do about it directly. Malherbes certainly ought to know his own painting.

However, French officialdom is not unresourceful, and a couple of days later a newspaper piece appeared which subtly slandered the patriotism of Maurice Malherbes. The Luxembourg was a National Museum, its pictures therefore national treasure; whoever plundered the national treasure was of course not a good Frenchman. It implied, too, that Malherbes was now so old and feeble that he couldn't tell his own picture if he saw it.

That, of course, excited a certain frenzy. Dozens of letters were written defending Malherbes—who was actually at the height of his powers—the Luxembourg let go with another barrage and in no time at all there had been whipped up one of those fine artistic battles royal which can only occur in Paris. Well, well, it was lovely, and Malherbes and I, our two weeks more than over, took the Blue Train and went back to Trou-sur-mer.

But a situation existed at home.

Not an hour after we arrived Malherbes sent his cook down the hill with instructions to bring me back without fail.

"Regard," he said, when I stepped into his big white studio, and I regarded. Around the floor were strewn more than a dozen crates, and there was no doubt what they contained: pictures.

"From everywhere they come," Malherbes said. "England, America, Kansas City, Madrid, Glasgow. Look."

"What did you expect?" I said.

Malherbes began to walk up and down. "But what do I do?"

"Open them."

He made a violent gesture with his arms. "Am I a carpenter? Am I no longer a painter? Do I put away my brushes and get out a hammer?"

"You have a certain obligation," I said.

"I?"

"Naturally. You've put a sinister bar over every picture."

Malherbes considered, but he obviously wasn't impressed. Suddenly he shook a finger at me and nodded his head. "I know what I will do. I will send a telegram to everybody and say 'Don't send pictures.'"

I said, "Have you a list of everybody?"

"A list?" Malherbes said, "where would I get a list? Ah, I see what you mean."

"Anyway," I said, "you would be unfair to yourself. Would

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anyone ever again believe he had a real Malherbes if you refuse? You must protect your reputation."

Malherbes nodded. "Yes, yes. But I can't have this. Look. And I have a picture I have thought of I must paint tomorrow. Well, well. We'll see."

We saw a couple of days later, when he strode into my house, his beard and cape flying, and a triumphant look in his eye. "Now it is done," he said.

"How?" I said.

"I have just been over to Nice, to the headquarters of the press wires—Reuters, Associated, and the rest of them. I have given them a message for the world."

"Did they take it?" I said.

"Of course they took it, dog."

I laughed. "It was what?"

Malherbes sat down and pushed aside all my notes I had so carefully arranged. "It came to me last night," he said, "when I could not sleep for worrying and because I had eaten too much *langouste gratinée*. Now listen."

"Yes."

"I have said I will look at any picture—provided, of course, it is accompanied by enough money to open and shut it and pay the return freight. That is only natural, I think—now even you will have to admit I am fair, eh?"

"But where is the catch?" I said.

"So," Malherbes shut his eyes and waggled his head in a smile, "this is what I also said. I said I would return the real pictures but the *forgeries I would not return*."

"I don't see anything so sly about that," I said.

Malherbes waved me away. "Ah! You do not know people. There I am wiser than you. In America you do not know everything. Listen my friend, no one who owns pictures, no one, will risk losing even a *false* Malherbes."

He banged the table to make his point. Then he leaned back to hear what I would say.

I scratched my head. "There may be something in it," I said. "And I think principally what there is in it is vanity."

"And why not?" Malherbes said.

"It's a fancy scheme," I said, "but if it succeeds, it's somehow basically immoral."

"Ah," Malherbes said, "but it is the world that will be immoral, not I. You wait."

Well, we did not have to wait long. The world, in a spectacular demonstration of a point, continued to send the pictures. Malherbes

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was, I thought, taken aback. He could not quite understand what had gone wrong. His trouble was that he was a simple man—vain, I have said, yes, but he had the vanity of the creator, the man who can *do* and knows it, not the vanity of the possessor, the owner. He knew his pictures were worth a great deal of money, but I think their money value was to him a thing of an instant, the instant at which his dealer took a cheque. Before that, leaning against the wall in his studio, or after, hanging on the wall in a museum, they were not money, but beauty, something to be loved. So by that standard, even a false Malherbes could be cared for, and who would want to lose something he cared for?

But the world, from Capetown to San Francisco, took a different attitude, and the pictures continued to arrive. Finally, with a shrug, Malherbes accepted the situation, hired a framer's assistant to uncrate and crate the pictures, and himself spent, I suppose, no more than five minutes a week saying "yes" or "no."

He said to me once, "It is not so bad, really. Most people seem to have an exaggerated idea of what it costs to undo the crates. I have managed pretty well. Besides the framer's boy, I have paid all my household bills out of what they send and laid in a barrel of brandy beside."

"Let's hope it keeps up," I said.

"Well, I have painted a good many pictures. I was not lazy, fortunately."

I asked him another day if he had found many forgeries, but about that he was noncommittal. "Some, some," he said.

The traffic in pictures lasted about twelve or fourteen weeks, then not abruptly, but certainly, it began to fall off. By the end of March the framer's boy was let go. In April only two pictures turned up. The scandal had died down, and the collectors of the world, apparently, were satisfied.

That was the end of that.

It is not, of course, the end of my story. But I hesitate, at this point, over just how I will go on, for one hates to admit he has been made a fool of, which I certainly was.

Well, the spring arrived, drenched in the private sunlight of the Riviera. I had worked hard all winter, and I had to use all my willpower to finish, in that despoiling weather, what I was doing. Finally I realized there was one thing in the world I wanted to do: Go home. Within a week I was ready.

Malherbes made as if to be appalled at my departure. "But it is *spring*," he said.

"If you were in America and it were spring," I said, "you would want to come back here."

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He shrugged. " It is hardly the same thing."

On my last night he had me to dinner. There were just the two of us, together with a selection of the finest produce of France's seas, farms and vineyards; the greatest meal, as I remember, I ever ate.

We did not have an over amount of wine, so what happened after dinner cannot be laid to any sort of alcoholic recklessness; no, I believe Malherbes intended from the beginning to tell me what he did, in fact I know so.

Understand the scene: We were still sitting at a big table in the studio with wine and coffee and cheeses and fruit, we were full of inexpressibly good food, we were feeling sentimental and sad for we did not know when we would see each other again.

Malherbes, then, suddenly laid his hands flat on the table and, looking at me steadily, said, " I can trust you."

I said, " Yes."

" You are," Malherbes said, " like all artists, dishonourable."

" I'm afraid so."

" I have known that. Come along."

Believe me, at that moment, I had no idea of what was about to happen. Malherbes got up, took a key from his pocket, walked over to a door, opened it, and beckoned me to follow. The door led onto a narrow stairway, going down. At the foot of it was another door which Malherbes also had to unlock. From there, darkness. Malherbes took my hand and led me a few steps, then, " Stand here," he said. A moment later the place was flooded with light.

We were in an underground gallery, a huge room, fifty feet long, with high ceilings and careful brilliant illumination. It was a gallery, for on the walls were hung thirty-five or forty of the most beautiful Malherbes in the world.

When I saw, I let out my breath. " Whew."

Malherbes nodded. " A pleasure, eh ? "

" My old friend," I said, " I have never seen so many together before in my life."

" No. No one could afford it," he laughed, " except me."

I stood silent for a moment, looking. One after another, masterpieces. Finally, " Why," I said, " are they down here, locked up ? And why did you say you could trust me ? "

Malherbes sucked in his cheeks. Then he said, " Because, my friend, these are the forgeries."

I said flatly, " I don't believe it."

I shall never forget the answer to that, as long as I live. Malherbes said, very quietly, " You are quite right. Let me rather say, these are the pictures I *said* were the forgeries."

I must have looked the way I felt, for Malherbes laughed at the

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face I made. "There were no forgeries," he said. "None at all. I merely wanted some of my pictures home again, and it was a way to get them."

I did not try to say anything, I simply waited for Malherbes to go on.

"I do not like to sell my pictures. They are my history and my heart, and I like to have that with me, so I can remember myself. But sometimes I have to sell, to live, The price, however, is not enough to buy what I have to put into a picture; that, while I am alive, is private, and without a price."

"This is extraordinary bookkeeping," I said.

Malherbes laughed. "Oh, the whole affair has been good fun, I tell you. So many times I wanted to let you in on the secret, but that would have spoiled the joke."

"But look here," I said, "it all came about by accident. That picture at the Samuels' . . ."

"Quite a good picture, and quite authentic," Malherbes said, "I was merely taking advantage of an opportunity. I had intended, when we went to Paris, to make a scene in some gallery with you. I knew you had friends who were newspapermen and you would tell them. It would have worked out the same. But when the Samuels had both a picture *and* a newspaper man, I seized the moment."

"I can't believe it."

"It is true. I had thought about it for some time. Then when you became so smart about that centaur, well, I decided I would play a trick on you."

"But this is international robbery," I said.

"No." Malherbes' voice was very warm and tender. "No. It is just Malherbes getting some pictures back."

"How will you explain to the Luxembourg?"

"Oh that, it doesn't worry me. And besides, I don't intend to explain anything to the Luxembourg."

"Do you mean," I said, "that you are going to keep the pictures for good?"

Malherbes nodded. "Oh yes."

Even then, I see, I had not grasped the extent of this wonderful swindle. I shook my head, unbelieving.

Malherbes locked his hands behind his back and began to walk up and down the gallery.

"My friend, consider," he said, "there are some things about pictures you perhaps do not know. Pictures, good pictures, have a life of their own. But, like pearls, they must be kept alive. You lock pearls up in a bank vault and they die. They must be kept warm, by contact with a human. Pictures are like that. You lock one up in a museum, with nothing but staring, stupid faces around it,

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and it becomes drab. No. It needs a good room and happy people who drink a glass of wine, and quarrel maybe, and make up, it needs some *feeling*, then it can change and develop into a good picture.

"It needs understanding. Isn't that true? Now I ask you, who can best understand the conception and the execution of a Malherbes? I ask you."

"Who?" I said.

He struck his chest. "Malherbes! I can understand best. And so I can give to the pictures the best home; they will be their happiest with me. It would be unfair to them, unfair, to deny them such an opportunity."

I am afraid I laughed. "These," I said, "are all extremely poor excuses."

"I know," Malherbes said. "I have not had much time to think them up. No. I told you the truth at the beginning. I wanted these pictures home again."

I suddenly had an evil idea. "The whole thing is of course monstrous," I said. "If it ever becomes known, you will be ruined."

"Yes," Malherbes said.

Then I said, "Just how far do you think you can trust me?"

Malherbes nodded, "I have considered that already. Upstairs is a crate, wrapped up, which you are to take to America. So come now, walk with me, let us look at the pictures carefully."

Now all these months later, here in the winter cold of New York, I read the sad and unconvincing news. Maurice Malherbes is dead of a stroke. I do not want to believe that; I hope he died of over-eating.

I look at my two Malherbes and remember him. My centaur *a son ami*, and the other—that was already wrapped up to take to America—a magnificent oil of my garden and a corner of the house, really one of his fine ones.

I remember him for that picture is signed in the bottom right hand corner, *Malherbes—an obvious forgery.*

* * *

COLD COMFORT

I test my bath before I sit,
And I'm always moved to wonderment
That what chills the finger not a bit
Is so frigid upon the fundament.

OGDEN NASH

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FANTASY IN COLOUR

God loves an idle rainbow
No less than labouring seas

RALPH HODGSON

I must say I like bright colours. I rejoice with the brilliant ones and am genuinely sorry for the poor browns. When I get to heaven I mean to spend a considerable portion of my first million years in painting, and so get to the bottom of the subject. But then I shall require a still gayer palette than I get here below. I expect orange and vermilion will be the dullest colours upon it, and beyond them will be a whole range of wonderful new colours which will delight the celestial eye.

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, *Painting as a Pastime*

Scarlet and Shrilly Green

Somewhere, somewhen I've seen,
But where or when I'll never know,
Parrots of shrilly green
With crests of shriller scarlet flying
Out of black cedars as the sun was dying
Against cold peaks of snow.

WILFRID GIBSON

Cleopatra's Barge

—the poop whereof was of gold, the sails of purple, and the oars of silver, which kept stroke in rowing after the sound of the musicke of flutes, howboys, citherns, viols, and such other instruments as they played upon the barge. And now for the person of Cleopatra herself: she was laid under a pavilion of cloth of gold tissue, apparelled and attired like the goddess Venus commonly drawn in pictures . . .

Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans,
translated by SIR THOMAS NORTH, 1535-1601

The Old Moons

" *Yes, a band of men in blue aprons cutting up the old Moons and making Stars of them ! . . .*"

THE STRANGE JOURNEY OF TUFLONGBO

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Disraeli

He wore a black velvet coat lined with satin, purple trousers with a gold band running down the outside seam, a scarlet waistcoat, long lace ruffles falling down to the tips of his fingers, white gloves with several brilliant rings outside them, and long black ringlets rippling down upon his shoulders . . .

JOHN LOTHROP MOTLEY,
in a letter to his wife, June 13th, 1858

I Have A Gentil Cok

I have a gentil cok
crowyt me day,
He makes me rysyn erly
my matyns for to say.

I have a gentil cok
comyn he is of gret,
His comb is of red corel,
his tayl is of jet.

His legges ben of azour
so gentil and so smale,
his sporës arn of sylver quyt
In the worte wale;

His eyyn arn of cristal
lokyn al in ambyr,
and every night he perchit hym
in myn lady's chaumber.

Author Unknown

—And A Golden Pheasant

But it cannot suffice to say that the Golden Pheasant is red-breasted. He is crimson or scarlet fronted. He is, primarily, a red and golden Pheasant; he has straight brushed golden hair, glittering like strands of brass, and flashing eyes. His cape is golden orange, and each of its segments is tipped or edged with blue. Below that, his mantle is metallic green with black edging, and his secondaries are dark purple. The saddle of his back is straight and golden as his hair. His long tail feathers are Pheasant-eyed . . . But the ghostly white Peacock is most beautiful of all. The spreading of its tail is one of the wonders of the world. The ghostly white Peacock is the shadow of the Milky Way, and as huge a mystery, meaning all or nothing.

SACHEVERELL SITWELL, *The Hunters and the Hunted*

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Dust of Gold

His Eyes were languishing, and yet had a peculiar sort of lustre: his Hair was curled, and yellow, resembling Flame, when he walked in the sun; which made some men fancy he was powdered with dust of Gold.

HERODIAN, 3rd Century A.D.,
translated by a Gentleman of Oxford, in 1698

Processional

Along the avenue of cypresses,
All in their scarlet cloaks and surplices
Of linen, go the chanting choristers,
The priests in gold, and black the villagers.

D. H. LAWRENCE, 1885-1930

Coals of Fire

There was little or no morning bank. A brightening came in the east; then a wash of some ineffable, faint nameless hue between crimson and silver; and then coals of fire.

These glimmered a while on the sea-line, and seemed to brighten and darken and spread out, and still the night and stars reigned undisturbed; it was as though a spark should catch and glow and creep along the foot of some heavy and almost incombustible wall-hanging; and the room itself be scarce menaced. Yet a little after, and the whole east glowed with gold and scarlet, and the hollow of heaven was filled with daylight.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, 1850-1894, *The Ebb Tide*

Cinque-spotted

On her left breast
A mole cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops
I' the bottom of a cowslip.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Cymbeline*

Golden Apples

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.

The Book of Proverbs

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ROSINBACK

Bred unwanted, reared unloved, on that night the real Boy Pedro was born

by JAMES MARTIN YOUNG

IF ever a creature was one too many for this swarming world, that was the boy Pedro. From the day when she knew he was on the way, Marietta the trapeze artist had as much time for him as a dog has for a flea beneath its collar.

"My art!" she wailed. "My career!"

She ranted at Juan her husband until he scuttled off the showground like a sinner with Beelzebub himself on his tail. He was never seen again at the circus.

I tried to din some sense into Marietta. "Pregnancy is not a disease," I told her. "A woman's body was made for bearing children. Lie up for a week or two after it comes, and you'll be as agile as ever."

I could have saved my breath. She was sure she would never find her balance again up in the high top. Her confidence was gone, as well as her partner, and Marietta was finished. So, even before he saw the light of day, the boy had a debt chalked against him.

Marietta hung on with us for a couple of years, working in the pay-box, making shape at helping me with the wardrobe, moping. Then Marco, the Boss, put his foot down.

"You're surly with the crowd," he said, "and you're as much use to Scotch Hannah as a needle without an eye. Besides, the public are noticing how you treat that kid of yours. Gives the company a bad name. You're fired."

She went. But she forgot to take Pedro.

What the boy needed was someone to take a flannel to his neck and a comb to his tousled black mop, and feed him and hug him and tuck him up in a safe cosy bed. We were all too busy croaking at the mean trick Marietta had played on us.

I may not be the only one, this hot lazy Sunday, trying to count how many times I tossed a bit of kindliness his way. True, I often slipped him a bowl of hot soup, and sometimes I would take a scrap of old material and run him up a shirt or a pair of little pants. But whatever any of us did was done almost shamefacedly, as if it were not a case of showing pity to the boy so much as aiding and abetting Marietta.

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For a time we thought we would trace her and wish him back on her. He was past three when the Boss decided that we would never manage it.

"We have to get rid of him," he said. And no one argued.

He was dropped at an orphanage at Lyons. Two days later, when we were heading south again, I heard a small sound among the costumes in the wardrobe van. I pulled aside a bunch of clothes, and crouching in a corner was Pedro, the big brown pop-eyes staring up at me out of the swarthy, pointed face.

"Please!" he squeaked. "Please! Please!" Again and again.

I gave him a bun, and shook my fist at him and told him I'd have the skin off him if he made a sound. I chivvied him out as soon as we had pulled into our new stand, and Pedro turned up that night in the horse-tent, chattering to the ponies as he could never, even at the last, talk to any of the troupe.

He was handed over after that to various keepers—in Grenoble, in Marseilles, in Clermont. He was left with a tribe of gipsies we met among the hills around Le Creusot. Always, and Heaven knows how, he found his way back to the circus. Always, back to his beloved horses.

Little stupid! Still, I know the pull of the showgrounds. Did I not walk out on the Countess who took me to the Riviera as her lady's maid, to marry Marco and travel the roads with him? And have I not stuck to the circus—more fool I—though it must be a quarter of a century since the Boss forgot that Hannah the wardrobe mistress happens to be his wife?

A show like ours can carry no passengers. Well did Pedro know that, and every time he came back he would bustle around like an ant, looking for jobs to do to justify his existence.

It was I who brought about the end of this dumping of him here, there and everywhere. The Boss was at my van door one day when I spotted Pedro dripping sweat as he polished the Arabs' ring harness. The brass ornaments twinkled. The red and black leather shone in the sun.

"Marco, he's useful," I said.

It was a discovery. The Boss only grunted, but that season passed and a new one came, and Pedro stayed.

Pedro stayed, but on no sort of terms. He was still nobody's boy. He could not call a bunk in one of the vans his own. He lived and slept among the horses. He was a cipher.

And yet in all conscience he was certainly useful as he scratched his way through the first years of his life, bullied and kicked around. We should have realised how much we depended on Pedro, the first time he disappeared.

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It was on the final day of our stay at Bruges. He was sixteen by then, and he had been sent off to some village to pick up an aged horse for Carl Olsen's cats. He did not come back.

In the morning the circus had to be dismantled and the wagons loaded without him. Everyone was in a villainous temper.

"Pedro!" we shouted. "Pedro!" At the pitch of our voices, as if the very force of our irritation must bring him scurrying to his hundred-and-one menial duties. But he was nowhere on the show ground.

We set out at last for Ghent a good hour late, and a few kilos beyond Bruges there was Pedro. He was sitting feeding handfuls of dusty grass to a decrepit grey nag that lay collapsed on the roadside.

The procession halted, and he got shakily to his feet—a skinny, under-sized tatterdemalion, those spaniel-eyes of his wide with trouble as we tumbled out of vans to berate him.

"*Vaurien!* Why weren't you there to inflate me?"

"*Coquin!* You know a girl's legs must be massaged every night!"

"The cesspit . . ." "*Voleur!* What have you done with my best new lariat?"

He glanced from voice to angry voice, apologetically.

"The horse," he said mildly, "couldn't walk any further."

"The horse!" "He calls it a horse!" "Couldn't walk!"

We tossed his explanation from one to another, mocking it. The grey Belgian vanner, a sorry bonebag with flies clustered on its harness sores, snickered hungrily.

"And you lacked the sense," the Boss said, "to leave the brute where it lay and come back for a truck and a pole-axe."

Pedro's mouth twisted as if with bodily pain.

"It's young," he said. "Not more than six. The teeth . . ." He opened its jaws. "It has been starved. Ill-treated."

The concert of vituperation broke out again.

"It's a good animal—and young," Pedro pleaded, looking only at the Boss, with a hopeless hopefulness. Horses were his life, his friends and his brothers.

"If it's young," said Carl Olsen, "all the better feed for my cats. Get it knocked on the head and let's move on."

Pedro gazed at the Boss, an agony in his eyes.

"It's a fine horse," he said. "If it was fed and tended . . ."

"Rubbish! Get on with the job!" Olsen said, and lunged at the boy. The horse must have smelt the cats about his clothes. It jerked itself up and stood there, every rib outlined, its scraggy barrel seeming to be hung on its legs by the knobbly skin. Olsen snatched at its halter rope, but it swerved away and, breaking into an ungainly gallop, lumbered off along the road to Ghent.

Pedro ran after it. The two disappeared round a bend. The

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procession got under way again, and although we made three more halts we found no trace of either horse or boy. The flat countryside appeared to have swallowed them up. In truth, as we found out later, we passed over their heads as they hid on the tow-path under a canal bridge.

We missed Pedro, but only in a vexed, resentful way. His absence was an even worse offence than his presence had been.

We crossed Belgium and swung south on our usual circuit, down eastern France, along the Mediterranean coast, back north by way of Toulouse, Bordeaux, Paris, and once more Belgium. The whole tour took us two years.

As we passed again through the district where Pedro had vanished we came upon a small farm which stood out curiously in that drab landscape. There is often a cluttered dreariness about Belgian peasant homesteads. This one was not only a model of tidiness and order, but doors, implements, sheds, everything that could carry paint was done up in gaudy lemon and green—the exact colours of our outfit. Near the house, in a walled patch which must once have been a garden, a circle the size of a circus ring was marked out with a low bank of turves. In a potato field nearby someone was working with a grey horse.

The Boss signalled a halt. From the farmhouse came a pink, plump woman who screamed to us to move on. We were a gang of chicken-stealers, vagabonds, seducers of lonely widows.

"Who," said Marco, "is the workman, there?"

"Mingle with your own affairs!" she stormed. "*Allez!*".

But the youth in the potato field had unyoked his horse and, springing on its back, came riding towards us. He was Pedro.

His clothes were as shabby as always, and he had the same old underdog's look, but I could see the signs of an eagerness inside him; something he could not suppress. As for the horse, it was hardly possible to believe that this sleek, rounded beast was the same animal. Pedro was urgent to show it to the Boss.

"See! I said it was a fine young horse! See!"

"It belongs to me," said Marco quickly.

"To my cats," said Carl Olsen.

"Truly it belongs to you, Boss," Pedro admitted. "But Sacred Lady! You wouldn't kill such a horse for the lions! He's a born rosinback. I've trained him. Every evening I've worked . . ."

"My lions are in need of meat," Olsen remarked.

"I'll show you," Pedro said. "Come, Prince!"

He flung off the cumbersome harness, his thin hands shaking with excitement, and ran to the ring. The grey trotted after him, nuzzling affectionately against him. Pedro fetched a bucket of rosin

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and sprinkled handfuls on Prince's back. He kicked off his heavy boots and, setting the horse cantering, made a leap from the parapet of turf and landed upright on his mount.

He circled the ring three times doing rapid forward somersaults. He got a rope and skipped. He rode balanced on his hands. He rode standing and juggling three bottles while Prince did a series of waltzing turns. He came shyly back to the Boss, Prince keeping fondly beside him.

"Is he not a wonder-horse?" he said. "But so steady! And so handsome! Is he not a true rosinback?"

Of course, the rosinback of the trick rider is no relation to the thoroughbred liberty horses of the circus, nor to the aristocrats of the *haute école*. Prince had the right build, but so has many a common cob. He had the broad platform of a back, the rounded croup, the sturdiness. Also, he had a good appearance. His creamy-coloured mane and his long, full tail were silken. His every hair shone.

But apart from all that, Prince had something else. I can only call it charm. Horses, like men, can look sour or contented, benign or malicious, silly or wise. Somehow, Prince was a lovable beast. He had a placid and friendly air. He seemed to smile. We liked him.

"Is he not—magnificent?" Pedro asked.

"Not," said Marco drily, "for cat's meat, quite yet."

The Widow Reynaud, to whom the busy Pedro must have been like a gift from Heaven, passed from protests into tears. The boy was upset about leaving her, but he needed only a sign and he was ours again. I noticed that it was to the stable, and not to the house, that he went for his handful of belongings.

Pedro had his try-out at Metz. I tested half a dozen costumes on him, from gold-braided green coat and white buckskin breeches to spangled tights. None of them looked right. But finally I struck on what I felt sure was an inspiration. In reality he was on the verge of manhood, but I rigged him out in nothing more elaborate than checked shirt and khaki shorts, and the act was billed as "Prince and Boy Pedro." It seemed natural to name the horse first.

Pedro was pale about the mouth as he took the ring, and deadly serious. His riding, as I remember, was perfect. Without a strap of harness he managed Prince as if it were part of him. He was slick and sure in every movement. It was an exhibition of polished excellence, nothing less.

But Boy Pedro was a flop.

At the end, he got no more than a half-hearted spatter of applause. He sent Prince back into the ring alone to bow and paw, and only then came an enthusiastic, all-round hand-clap.

Pedro showed no sign of disappointment as he came out. He

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was smiling, until Marco grabbed him by the arm. "So!" he said. "You didn't get across."

I think Pedro was genuinely taken by surprise.

"But they liked Prince! At the end—you heard," he said, fondling the grey's genial face as it chinned his shoulder.

"If you're to be any good, you have to make them like you."

"But—you mean—we are not to go on again?" Pedro asked.

"The horse has something," said Marco, and gave it a sugar-lump. When Pedro was out of earshot he added with great bitterness: "Why should an egg like that be the best acrobatic rider I've ever had in my ring?"

"You thought he was that good?" I asked.

"An act is as good as the crowd thinks, no better," he grunted. "But we certainly have a horse, there."

"The boy might improve," I said.

"I want no improvement! I only want him to put himself over."

From Pedro, that seemed to be asking the impossible. In the ring it was the horse that carried the act, and outside it—that was something extra, thrown in. That was something unique.

Prince was never tied up. He wandered freely about the show-ground, following Pedro like a great, worshipful dog. When Pedro was sent into the streets of some new town on an errand, the rosin-back would clump along with him, close as he could get. And the public adored him. They looked at that amiable horse-face, and could not keep their hands off him. Housewives fed him carrots and lettuce leaves. Children parted with their sweets. Crowds mobbed him. They put sheets of paper under his hooves to get his autograph. They photographed him and petted him and kissed him—and nine out of ten of them hardly so much as noticed the nondescript youth who was in charge of him.

I find it heart-searching to reflect, on this disturbing day, that while Pedro still remained a dogsbody to the troupe, to Prince he was far above any of us. To Prince, Boy Pedro was God.

He was paid for his act, of course. Marco gave him only half what he was worth, but even so it was ten times as much as he needed. He slept with Prince, and he was innocent of any form of self-indulgence. We all knew that he must be salting away a tidy cache of francs.

One morning in Marseilles he came to my van with a parcel. Ivan the axe-thrower had looked in for a cup of coffee, and Pedro squirmed with embarrassment when it crossed my mind to invite him to join us.

Ivan was a gay young spark, a devil among the girls, and he never had a sou to call his own. He began chipping Pedro about

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being a man of means.

"Why don't you spend your money, Pedro?" he asked. "What do you live for man? Wine, clothes, a van of your own, good food and fat cigars—can't you see him, Scotch Hannah, puffing a big cigar? Why don't you take some of the pleasures of life?"

"I want nothing," Pedro said, grinning shyly.

"A woman!" cried Ivan. "You could afford one easily. A woman is better company than any horse. Am I right, Hannah?"

"You should know," said I.

"Get yourself a woman and find out the difference," Ivan shouted, as Pedro edged out of the van and away with Prince.

One can have surprises, even a hard-bitten old Scotswoman like me.

The next day I saw Pedro come walking across the showground with a piece of feminine frippery in tow. He made straight for my van, leading her by the hand. She was in a gaudy dress of cheap red artificial silk, with her cheeks rouged and her lips carmined, and her black hair gathered back and fixed with a flashy brilliant-studded comb. She was a young thing, and the instant I clapped eyes on her in all her shoddy war-paint I felt a mighty urge to lay the flat of my hand to her behind.

"This is Stella," Pedro said, looking six ways at once.

"Stella, is it?" I sniffed, glaring at the plastered face, the spindly legs and the garish clothes. "Stella who? Stella why?"

"I—I've bought her," Pedro said.

"You—what?" I said. Yes, one gets surprises!

He shuffled and made noises in his throat.

"Ivan told me I ought to spend my money."

"But—bought her? She's a child. Fifteen, not more!"

"Not more, but she was for sale," Pedro said. "It was at the docks. The woman asked fifty thousand francs. I told her I had only forty-two thousand, but she accepted that. I fear I deceived her, a little."

"My! My!" said I. "Still waters do run deep, then! You had more francs tucked away, had you?"

"Oh, no! But she thought I was from a ship that sails today. I did not tell her that I am of the circus."

"In case she might think you weren't good enough for her angel—is that it?" I said.

"She was anxious that I should leave France very soon," said Pedro. "Apparently, in Marseilles, girls are sold for export. But I have bought this one."

Several of the company had gathered round to stare and snigger. Most of them at one time or another had got the length of Scotch

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Hannah's tongue, but I had never wired into anyone as I did into Pedro. I must have harangued him and his painted Jezebel for fifteen minutes without a stop.

He took it all dumbly, as he always did, standing there gripping Stella's hand and waiting for me to exhaust myself. The girl began to cry. The tears rolled out of her dark eyes and down her encrusted face, streaking it. Only when at last I had to pause for breath did Pedro explain himself, in four timid words.

"I felt for her," he said.

As he gazed at the girl there came into my mind a picture of him that day with the fallen Prince on the roadside between Bruges and Ghent. It was exactly the same look, worried, nearly hopeless, inarticulately compassionate.

"She's a good girl," he said. "If she were cared for . . ."

I snatched her from him and hustled her into my van. I stripped that disgusting dress off her, and scrubbed the muck from her face, and went into town and bought her a schoolgirlish frock in checked gingham, and blue ribbons for her hair. I let her cry till I was soaked with her tears, and then I told her to stop it.

"The world hasn't come to an end yet," I said. "It's only begun, for you. Don't worry, dearie. I'll look after you."

That was how I, who was never blessed with a chick of my own, came by a ready-made daughter. And it was that night, when I took her to see the performance, that the real Boy Pedro was born.

Bred unwanted, reared unloved, he had lacked the self-pride to try to make an impression. But in the presence of someone whose state was even lowlier than his own, he fairly flung himself through the wall that had stood between him and the crowds. He acted for her delight, bursting out of himself in his desire to please her. The entire audience responded. He was the hit of the show.

To everyone—except Stella.

When he came to my van after the performance to hand in his costume, there was a difference about Boy Pedro. He had a sort of glow about him. He was eager and happy. He lingered in the doorway, the brown dog's eyes of him watching Stella.

"You like me?" he asked her, and smiled ingratiatingly.

She turned her face away from him, shuddering.

"Hop it, you," I said, "and leave her alone!"

He groped at the air and made shapes with his mouth, as if there were something more he wanted to say. He never got it out.

In the morning I went to Marco in a fighting mood. He was a stickler for everything and everyone in the outfit having a use, and I expected him to make trouble over my resolve to keep Stella. I

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found him in high good humour.

"Hard-hearted Hannah!" he chaffed. "I hear you cheated Pedro of his paramour last night."

"Paramour! She's only an infant," I said. "And you can make up your mind to this—from now on, she travels with me. The child needs protection."

"From Pedro?" He gave out a great laugh. "She'll have it, with you!"

"You say she can stay, then?" I asked.

"But of course. She can be a programme seller. See to it that she is in the big top always when Pedro is on. And never let him get nearer to her than the length of a tent-pole."

"Your morals seem to have improved," said I.

"You do me an injustice. I'm thinking of the act. Last night, for the girl, Pedro was a showman. Why not again, and still again? But all the time—your protection. You see? Like dangling a carrot in front of a donkey's nose."

"Except that the donkey gets its carrot at the day's end," I said. "He won't get Stella. That girl has a future, now."

I was jealous of my new possession. I had big ideas for her. She had got under my skin. And if the last thing I thought of was Pedro's feelings—well, none of us ever considered them.

I'd had her three days before I let drop a chance exclamation in my native tongue and set her chattering to me in English, with a soft West-country lilt. Her French was the language of the gutter, but as I poured questions at her and drew answering phrases out of the depths of her recollection I found her speaking English with taste and refinement.

There was little, so little that she could tell me. She had only shadows of memories of her mother, who had belonged, she believed, to Plymouth. With nothing to go by other than the quality of Stella's speech, I'd still be certain that the girl whom some sailor had taken away and finally dumped in Marseilles came from a decent home, where some one might still be waiting for news of her.

She died when my Stella was around six, and after that . . . well, God alone knows how the lamb ever survived. All I care for is that she did.

The link of the common tongue was but one thing that bound us together. I loved her, that's all. But it worries me now to recall how greatly I cared about her feelings, and how little about Pedro's.

Marco's plan worked. That was all that seemed to matter so far as Pedro was concerned. At show after show he sweated his soul out, trying to captivate Stella, and the crowds whistled and stamped and

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encored him. He went over big.

But not with her. She had never known him as the meek slubberdegullion who was anyone's slave at the lash of a tongue. In her eyes he was the man who had bought her. She had seen him groping among his ragged clothes and producing the money to pay for her, after the hell-cat into whose hands she had fallen had gone over the charms of her immature young body and assured him that she was a virgin.

He tried. Saints in Heaven, how he tried. This is a thing that will haunt me, the sight of him standing in the doorway of my van again and again with that shy, anxious smile, never approaching her, never near to touching her, but just asking:

"Little Stella—you like me?"

She gave him a wooden look, and I usually gave him his answer.

"Buzz off, there, and don't make a nuisance of yourself!"

He bought countless presents for her—dresses, pieces of jewellery, a handbag, a gold watch, perfumes, useless trippers' souvenirs.

"For you," he would say, caressing her with a hungry cajoling look, and always, pleadingly: "You like me?"

She did not feel it, and so she did not say it, although she soon lost all her fear of him. His abject devotion was a constant joke among the others, but it never amused Stella. Often it irritated her, and now and again it made her feel almost sorry for him. When she felt sorry, she could be really harsh with him.

"Pedro, you fool! Why spend your money on me? I don't want your gifts! Look at this bracelet. Hideous! Who could possibly wear it? Take it back and buy yourself a coat instead. You're like a scarecrow!"

It was no use. He had been browbeaten all his life, and it was second nature to him to keep popping up again. He would retreat and come back, persistent as a mosquito.

"Stella, you like me?"

But only the nameless crowds liked Pedro. And in an odd way, that did not seem to count with him. Another actor would have grown swelled headed at the receptions he drew. But Boy Pedro would have given all the applause of a year of audiences for one smile from Stella.

There was certainly something in her for any man to admire, as time went on. I have brushed her fine, silky dark hair for numberless hours over the last three years. I have made her clothes, and taught her how to wear them with grace and distinction—like a Countess! I have looked after her, body and mind, and with joy watched her thin figure fill out and develop into willowy, rounded loveliness.

There remains on her face a faint shadow of memories. It gives her a thoughtfulness, and sometimes a wistfulness, which is the very

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essence of charm. She is the apple of my eye, and she was never more so than yesterday afternoon when she brought Jacques Marchand to my van.

Jacques is tall for a Frenchman, with a rugged, masculine sort of face and a very fetching smile. His people own a small factory where they make dress ornaments and fancy metal goods. He is working hard to help build the business up. He might be better-looking, and he might be better-off, but Jacques has something sound and solid in him that I like.

My chicken is nineteen now, and these last weeks have been a dream for her. We have been in Paris for a month. It was on the first night of our season here that Jacques dropped into the show. Stella sold him a programme, and if it takes neither of them less than a lifetime to recover from what happened to them at that first encounter, I might manage in the end to forgive him!

Yesterday he showed me a chaste and expensive diamond ring.

"My family approves," he said. "But . . . you, Madame?"

Well, it comes. Still, we Scots folk like nothing less than parading our emotions, and that must be why I answered as I did.

"Seeing you'd take her whether I let you or no," I said, "I'll not start an argument. But come to that, she's not mine to give. After all, it was Boy Pedro who bought her."

I meant nothing. I was joking. But Jacques bristled at once.

"This had better be settled, once for all," he said. "It is intolerable, the thought of another man having given money for her. I am not rich. It means the sacrifice of something from the home we shall make, but there is only one way to do it. Pen, Madame, and ink, if you please, while you call him here. Quickly!"

I did not like it very much, but I went to the step and shouted for Pedro. He came hurrying from the direction of the horse-tent, Prince trotting along with him and the customary knot of children bringing up the rear. Jacques stood beside my darling, one arm around her.

"Stella and I," he said, "are to be married."

There had been no introductions. Just the bald statement, like that. I doubt if Pedro had had any idea of what had been going on.

Pedro blinked and stared, inarticulate as usual.

"You made some arrangement in Marseilles, and paid forty-two thousand francs," Jacques went on, and handed him a banker's draft he had written. "I now pay you back fifty thousand, your money, with interest. I would have you know that you have no claim on Stella. It is understood?"

Pedro fingered the scrap of paper, still dumb.

"You are willing that we two should be married?" Jacques

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asked sharply. " It makes no difference, but you are agreeable ? "

Pedro made no sign of having heard. He had fixed his gaze on Stella, and I half expected to hear him asking again his old, hundred-times-repeated question : " You like me ? "

" Listen, and answer ! " Jacques said impatiently. " You are not under the illusion that she belongs to you ? "

Pedro appeared to jerk himself out of a dream. There was a change, hard to describe, in his expression. His eyes and his mouth remained as mild as always, yet there was a new firmness about them.

" But one does not belong to any other person," he said quietly. " One belongs to oneself. Naturally."

I should say that after he had spoken there was a full minute when nothing was heard but the din of the fair in the background and, close by, the slap, slap of the children patting Prince's well-groomed hide. Pedro had put no hot feeling into his brief speech, no resentment, no criticism and certainly no rebuke ; it was as if he had been compelled to state something too simple and obvious to need saying.

" One belongs to oneself. Naturally . . ."

So said Pedro the dogsbody, Pedro the universal doormat.

Somehow I did not feel surprised when Stella slipped away from her lover's arm. She went forward, flushed and serious, and for the first time in three years she touched Pedro. She took hold of both his hands.

" Pedro," she said, " you make me feel ashamed."

" But no . . ."

" I owe you so much ! I've never thanked you. I've been very ungrateful, very unkind. I . . ." She hesitated, full of emotion, not knowing how to put it. She found, I feel sure, quite the perfect formula. There was no doubt that it came from her heart. " I do admire you," she said. " I do like you, Pedro, very much."

She gave a quick glance at Jacques, and kissed Boy Pedro on both cheeks.

Stella was not at last night's performance. For that I feel very glad. Jacques took her to his people for the week-end, and I deputised for her with the programmes.

I asked Marco how he thought Boy Pedro's act would go without Stella.

" He's a showman now," he said. " It should make no difference."

" But if the boy's heart is broken ? "

" Him ? His heart ? Who does he think he is ? "

And so Marco brushed it aside. But I, who had heard Pedro in a single phrase call his soul his own and assert his right to human

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dignity, watched with some anxiety for his entrance. I did not want to see him lose his grip on the crowd, as well as his girl, all in one day.

His number showed, and the band struck up. With Prince butting him from behind he came tumbling into the ring, and the audience gave him a big hand before his act had even started. He sprang on to the spacious back with what seemed as much bounce and sprightliness as on any ordinary night.

In his first few circuits of the ring he was magnificent. I thought I had never seen him riding better. There was an electric vitality in every movement he made. He was excelling himself. He had the crowd in his pocket.

I was watching closely, and yet I saw nothing, sensed nothing wrong. I was as much taken by surprise as anyone when the catastrophe came. It happened when Pedro was doing his handstand, and it looked to be the rosinback's fault. Prince stumbled clumsily against the edge of the ring, and fell to his knees. Boy Pedro pitched heavily to the ground.

At the concerted "Oh!" from the packed benches the horse picked himself up, and little harm would have been done if he had stood quietly to be remounted. But he went plunging forward, and his off fore hoof caught Boy Pedro a crack on the forehead, knocking him right out and bringing blood gushing from a great, ragged wound.

Our beloved Prince, gentlest and most adorable of horses, seemed to go stark mad. Only once before, from a stable which was on fire, have I heard a sound like the long, squealing neigh he gave out. A horrible, panic-making sound.

Prince stood over the prone figure of Boy Pedro, pawing him, mouthing at him, as if savaging him. People began to scream. A number of men leapt into the ring and tried to drag Prince away from Pedro. It was the worst thing they could have done. The horse kicked out in all directions. Half a dozen spectators were sent flying, some of them badly injured. Marco stripped off his red ringmaster's coat and flung it over Prince's face. Our own men brought ropes and chains, and it was only by main force that the grey was dragged out of the tent.

An ambulance arrived. Pedro, with the other casualties, was carried to it. The horse's slaver was on his clothes and skin, but it was noticed that there were no tooth-marks.

In my caravan in the afternoon Boy Pedro had come real to me as a person, as an individual. I was concerned about him. The others were more anxious about Prince and his astonishing lapse. We all loved that horse in a very special way.

Carl Olsen made the discovery.

He had been more ardent than anyone in applying sticks to

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Prince's hide as they got him out of the ring. In the horse-tent, afterwards, he shouted for Marco.

"See this, Boss," he said. "Watch!"

He aimed a blow at Prince's face. He did it again and again. Never once did Prince jerk his head aside to try to avoid the stick. He reacted only after he had been hit.

Marco himself tested it, flicking a finger across and across the wild and troubled eyes. Prince did not blink.

"He has gone blind," Olsen said. "Stone blind."

The sympathy and emotion that the knowledge aroused amongst us was very deep and real. We understood, then, that Prince had not been savaging Pedro, but only expressing his regret and anxiety; only trying to protect him when he kicked out.

"So Prince's career in the ring has finished," I said.

"Finished," said Marco heavily.

"And a blind horse cannot be sold," Olsen remarked.

We waited, a group of us, for the Boss's word, but we knew what it must be. We are not a wealthy outfit. We have to be severely practical to survive. We cannot afford luxuries like sending a beast into happy retirement after it has served its day. Others, many others, have been well-liked. Some have had accidents. Some have just grown old.

"He's only fit for cat's meat, poor devil," Marco said. "Get him sent to the knackery on Monday, Carl."

We filtered into the mess-tent, but no one wanted supper. We talked about the rosinback, and we talked about Pedro. I told the others of the dignity of Pedro as he spoke his simple creed: "One belongs to oneself. Naturally."

I wanted them to feel what I had felt, and I could not have found a better occasion. Prince and Boy Pedro were inseparably linked up. They were part of one another.

At midnight, to my astonishment, Marco came to my van.

"What do you think you want?" I asked him curtly.

He gave a laugh, and shrugged.

"I thought you might stroll along with me to the hospital. I want news of the injured. I may have to pay compensation for a death or two."

I looked at him closely.

"You're moved," I said, "about Pedro. You too."

"He's a good act. I'll get him another horse."

"I wish I could get him another Stella, as easily!"

"There are many women," said Marco.

We had some difficulty, at so late an hour, but we were allowed to go to Pedro's bed. He had recovered consciousness, and although he was seriously bruised and shaken there were no bones broken.

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He was swathed in bandages.

"Prince," he said. "It was an accident. He was not at fault."

It was never Marco's way to beat about the bush.

"Prince has gone blind, Pedro."

Pedro gaped. "You—know?" he said.

"You mean you were aware of it?" Marco cried. "And yet you took him into the ring! The damage! The compensation . . ."

"But Prince has been blind a very long time," Pedro said. "He was a little blind even when I found him. Then more and more. You have seen how he always walked close to me. I was his eyes."

Knowing, it seemed obvious. And yet none of us had guessed.

"Then what happened tonight?" Marco demanded.

"The blame was all mine. Truly, Boss! I was careless. I was—thinking of other things."

"Thinking about Stella?" I asked him. I felt mean. I had stolen her from him.

"But yes. Stella." He uttered her name with a sigh that blew chill right through me. Then I noticed his eyes. They were shining. His whole face was as if lit up from within.

"I was above myself," he said. "At last—she likes me. You heard. You saw. She likes me!"

He was in the seventh Heaven. He had all he wanted.

"I had swelled head. I was too large for my boots," Pedro said. "Usually I guide Prince with my hands, my feet. We are one. Tonight I had no thought. My skull was full of air, and so I caused him to stumble. But it will not happen again."

"It won't," said Marco. "When you're fit, you'll get a horse with eyes of its own. You'll be big stuff, Pedro."

"But Prince . . ." Boy Pedro jerked himself up in bed.

"Too big a risk," said Marco bluntly. "He's finished."

"You mean . . . but you wouldn't . . . Boss, you wouldn't . . ."

A nurse came forward and told us we were disturbing him. I think Marco was glad of the excuse to get away.

And now, this morning, on the step of my van, when I looked out, I found Pedro's ring costume, neatly folded. Talking to Marco, gesticulating, was an official of the hospital.

"But a patient is not a prisoner! If he is determined not to stay, we cannot hold him. This Pedro, if we had not given him his clothes, would have gone in pyjamas. It was impossible . . ."

I fingered the checked shirt, looking at the bloodstains. In the pocket was a folded piece of paper. I pulled it out. It was Jacques Marchand's draft for fifty thousand francs. Written on the back of it was the one word "Marco".

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Written? Not exactly. Pedro could neither read nor write. No one had ever troubled to teach him. But he had painted the entire outfit times without number, including Marco's name sprawled over every van and wagon in ornate letters full of twirls and flourishes, with a clown's face grinning from the final "O". He had copied it just like that on the draft.

A blind horse, Olsen had said, cannot be sold. But Prince's place in the horse-tent was empty.

It has been a morning of chatter, of argument, of reminiscence. The oldest amongst us have been remembering the oldest things, right back to the time of Juan and Marietta. All the company have been recalling my imitation of Pedro last night.

"One belongs to oneself. Naturally . . ."

We have been going about, from one to another, from group to group, and I have heard this one and that one, including Marco himself, taking account of the dignity of Pedro's self-belonging, and weighing it, and weighing him, and coming to the same disturbing knowledge as myself.

"I liked him," they are saying, half-astonished. "I liked the little devil . . ."

No one has said it grandly, as if it were a concession to Pedro, an act of magnanimity. A thoughtfulness goes with it, a twist of the lips, an unspoken question.

If the Boss, as I believe he will, decides not to search for Pedro, it will of course be because he is sure of two things. First, that Boy Pedro will never be separated from the useless horse, and second that he will not ride another. But behind those two practical reasons there may be just a hint of another one.

All of us, even Marco, have discovered that we liked Boy Pedro. It might be an embarrassment to face him again and wonder—did he ever like us?

* * *

NOVEMBER MORNING

These are the days when there's
much to be said for
Those sweltering weeks when we
all looked ahead for
A change in the weather, and
prattled in praise of
That wonderful season which
these are the days of.

S. S.

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GERDRUTA

They had lived in a world apart, a world unknown since the days of Paradise

by AINO KALLAS

DURING the Great Northern War, while the Russians were besieging Riga, a deadly pestilence called the Black Death came down from the interior to the islands, first to Hiiumaa, then to Saaremaa, thence across the little Sound to Muhu and finally during the autumn to the lonely island of Ruhnu.

Many tales are yet told of the coming of the plague. The fishermen of Hiiumaa were aware one evening of a strange, forbidding vessel which had anchored near the harbour of Eltermaa. They gathered together to discuss the newcomer, but rowed finally over with provisions.

When they had drawn near, the vessel seemed devoid of all human life, the deck was empty, the mast and spars like those on a derelict. They were about to row back to land, when suddenly a boy about a foot and a half in height and dressed in grey, climbed from the hold on to the deck and jumped straight from the bulwarks into the boat.

Twice they threw the boy into the sea, and twice he bounced back into the boat, like a grey-scaled fish. When they reached the shore he disappeared immediately among the hazel-bushes and all they had had time to see of him was that he was dressed in the German style with a three-cornered hat and a staff in his hand. Then the oldest on board the boat clasped his hands and suddenly each began to shiver; they understood: the plague had come to the island. The following day one half of the village of Eltermaa lay dead.

The plague took its victims suddenly; it germinated in the ground and fell as dew from the sky. People were beset by feverish, poisonous spasms, which caused the blood to boil in their veins. Their heads became roaring furnaces, a numb weakness overcame their limbs, and unconsciousness followed. Their poisoned blood broke out in blue tumours which covered the neck and armpits. Their faces were distorted beyond recognition before death, and their senses left them; within a few hours they died in grievous agony.

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Marvellous and terrible things happened; all was possible. Fiery red cocks sat on gate-posts and their crow meant death; whosoever saw them first and uttered a word about them, fell and died where he stood. God seemed to have forgotten the distinctions of class that He Himself had in His wisdom ordained between the Germans and the unfree. The plague chose not, showing no respect for ancient names or noble blood. A name in the book of the Plague betokened death for its owner. Highly-born Councillors of State, estate-owners and knights whose pedigrees stretched to the Crusades, died like the most wretched truck-servants or day-labourers; the one in his oaken bed, the other on his bundle of straw.

At the poorhouse both keepers and inmates died. The former German merchants of Kuresaar fell dead among the ruins of their demolished dwellings, behind the smoke-stacks of which they had sought shelter. Priests sank down in their pulpits while arraigning a generation so deep in sin that its degradation had called down Heaven's punishment; the bell-ringers died as they tolled the funeral chimes for others.

It was plain: God had closed the doors and windows of Heaven, but the gates of Hell stood wide open.

Having sought in vain for shelter in the Holy Sacrament and at the altar of the Church, men began secretly to sacrifice on the stone of Upa and in the sacred grove at Kaarma, where at the foot of a sacred holy mountain ash, human blood had once been spilt to appease Taara. But the old peasant gods were dead or become blind and deaf in their old age. Christ, the only Son of God, was helpless, but equally so Taara, the god of peasants.

But at night the little grey figure passed from hut to hut, from manor to manor. The charred doors of chimneyless huts opened before him as easily as the brass-clamped portals of the manors, and he touched the sleepers below the heart with the sharp point of his staff.

Summer came, and with it drought and heat, and the plague waxed fiercer. Whole villages were exterminated. The corpses were carried in loads to the bog-pits, piled over one another so that the flaxen tresses of young maidens swept the road as they passed. But soon there were no gravediggers, and the dead lay as they fell, no one daring to touch them.

The fields were left unploughed, meadows became choked with undergrowth.

In the lifeless villages, where the bodies lay unburied, the cattle, left to themselves, ran wild. Cows roamed in the forests, lowing with bursting udders. The spirit of the wolf awoke in homeless

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dogs; they attacked the flocks they had been set to herd, or, thinned to the bone, they crept through the villages, wondering whither the masters that fed them had disappeared. The starving swine broke from their sties and satisfied their hunger on the bodies of the plague-stricken, lying unblessed by the Church. From their hiding places in the marsh islands and the forests of Sõrve and Karja came the wolves, and with the freezing of the Great and Little Sounds the bears left the interior, seeking their prey.

The race of man seemed doomed to perish. Life came to a standstill with all the common tasks of man, the ploughing, the sowing and reaping, the hunt for game or fish, marriage. It seemed God's purpose to empty the land of man, and bring it to the state that prevailed before man's creation. But the land was far from being a Paradise. It was burned and wasted, and over the waters the Angel of Destruction moved.

At the time when all was God-forsaken a priest of German race lived in one of the coastal parishes, called Magnus Carponai and married to Beata von Krämer, of gentle birth, the daughter of a Councillor of State. They had several children, amongst whom a daughter Gerdruta, nineteen years old, was the eldest.

As so often with German maidens of noble birth brought up in the country, Gerdruta Carponai was of healthy and blooming appearance, over-browned perhaps in the summers by the sea wind, well proportioned, and with hair the colour of wild nuts inclining to copper as with her mother's family, eyes blue-green as gems, a finely modelled bridge to her delicately chiselled, aristocratic nose. When she sat beside her mother with proud neck bent, as befitted a virtuous maiden in the vicarage pew at church, the noble youths who arrived on horseback or driving teams of four at the German service, all gazed in her direction.

One Sunday, her cousin on her mother's side, Rembert von Rehren, of the manor of Loona and serving in the garrison at Fort Kuresaar, remained at the vicarage for the evening. August had set in and the dark cherries were ripening. Rembert von Rehren seized a ladder and, climbing into a tree, began to pelt Gerdruta with ripe cherries.

Gerdruta gathered them in her hands and her apron; finally she cast herself down in the grass below the tree and attempted with her lips to catch the falling berries, which gleamed like the ruddiest amber and split asunder with their ripeness. Rembert von Rehren was pale as he descended the ladder; his eyes could not withstand the blood of cherries on Gerdruta's lips. Standing opposite each other they were almost of a height, ruddy-haired, long-necked members of the same race. The vicarage garden was

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moist and silent: under a lichen-clad cherry-tree they kissed.

This happened, as legend tells, in August. The whole winter Gerdruta Carponai prepared her trousseau, for the nuptials were announced for the beginning of May.

But they were stern times and troubled, and in March the Cossacks and Tartars attacked and plundered the country from Kuivaste on the Sound of Muhu to Sõrve Säär. Closely on their footsteps came the plague, Rembert von Rehren being one of the first officers to die in the garrison of Kuresaar; he was followed by the greater part of the garrison.

At the end of June death swept through the Carponais' parish. It was one of the most fertile and thickly populated on Saaremaa; wherefore the destruction caused by the plague was greater than elsewhere, the sickness seeking out the most fertile spots. Carponai set watchers on the roads from other parishes, forbidding the entrance of beggars and strangers to the parish. He prepared a powder of sulphur and pine resin, with which he smoked the dwellings; the thresholds he sprinkled with vinegar and nitric acid.

He caused bonfires of juniper to be lit round the villages, to be kept alight day and night. The congregation gathered for Common Prayer at the Church. Nothing was of avail. The plague defied both prayers and nitric acid; it passed through fire and the smoke of burning juniper.

Carponai continued the fight with the courage of despair. He forced the survivors to drag out the bodies of the dead with boathooks through the windows and convey them to the grave. His wife and the four youngest children died; for lack of a sexton he climbed the steeple himself and tolled the funeral chimes. He would not surrender; as long as his feet would bear him, he attended the sick and comforted the dying. His daughter Gerdruta accompanied him, with eyes like blue-green ice, opened wide and cold, her mouth dead and pale.

One morning Carponai felt a fierce heat in his blood—it was the plague. He did not doubt for a moment that death was nigh and he commanded his daughter Gerdruta to bury the silver chalice and paten in the ground beside the church.

This done, he caused Gerdruta to bring the church registers, writing with nerveless hand in large and painstaking letters *omnes mortui*—all dead.

When Carponai drew his last breath the sun was already high in the sky. Gerdruta covered her father's body with a sheet and, going out, sat down on the lowest step of the stairs; she understood now that she was alone.

None other created in the same mould as herself existed; man, God's image, had died out.

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A great agony of the soul, deeper than bodily pain, came over her; she shouted out and then waited. But the silence continued, there was no one else.

Then Gerdruta decided to await death on the threshold of her home. She prayed to be allowed to die, offering voluntarily her youthful limbs, her virgin body to the plague.

But the hours sped by and death came not.

With the coming of evening she remembered suddenly that a one-eyed old woman, nearly ninety years of age, Liiva Ingel, had been alive a few days earlier. She remembered having passed Liiva Ingel's hut and seen smoke curling from the smoke-hole.

Gerdruta Carponai felt that God Himself had sent this thought. She set forth immediately, going straight over pasture-lands and bog, and her yearning to see a living human being was so great that it well nigh stifled her.

What mattered it that this being was a bleary-eyed, foul old woman, tottering on the verge of the grave!

Breaking through the last hazel-thicket, Gerdruta paused: before her lay a juniper heath with one lonely hut set in its midst. But the door was shut, likewise the smoke-trap, and no smoke was visible.

Gerdruta tried to persuade herself that the old woman had no fire burning at the time. But on opening the door of the hut, a familiar scene met her gaze: on the bed lay Liiva Ingel, dead of the plague; her body already cold and in the first stage of decomposition.

As though struck to the heart, Gerdruta Carponai turned and fled to the great forests, no longer knowing what she did. She fled before her own loneliness, heavier to bear than the plague itself.

Gerdruta Carponai did not know afterwards how long she had wandered in the wilds and bogs of Saaremaa. It was morning when she reached the seashore, a bright morning, a joy for insects and human beings alike. But the heart of Gerdruta Carponai ached with loneliness and was heavy with death; she decided to wait there and die.

She bent down to cast herself upon the beach, when suddenly in the damp sand she became aware of a human footprint.

There was no mistaking it. It was of recent date, the impress of a firm foot, the marks of toes and heel plainly visible, the instep arched. Behind it was a second, a third, a whole line of footprints along the smooth sand, disappearing only over a rise towards the land.

Gerdruta nearly collapsed. A human footprint! The world was not then empty of men. She was not alone.

And bending lower than ever before even the mightiest in the

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land, the proud, gentleborn Gerdruta Carponai bowed down and, with eyes brimming over with tears, humbly kissed the footprint of the unknown in the sand.

But the sudden joy proved too strong for her exhausted body, she dropped like a reed, and falling, lay senseless on the sand.

The sun had travelled a long way through the sky and was shining directly over the grey rocks when she awoke. She had slept many hours. She saw that while asleep she had been carried to the water's edge and placed on a heap of nets, a bundle of dry reeds serving as pillow.

To the left the shore rose in high rocky cliffs straight from the sea, but close under the cliffs she could see a dozen or so chimneyless huts and drying-poles for nets. The sea was calm, but a hollow booming told of a hidden swell.

Beside her a young man was broiling flatfish between two stones. He was dressed in ordinary peasant attire, wearing a coarse hempen robe kept together by a parti-coloured belt, and no footwear. He was very thin, with long uncombed light hair, eyes light grey.

Seeing Gerdruta awake, he said in the peasant tongue without leaving his occupation :

" Thou wilt eat ? "

Gerdruta only nodded in reply. The man handed her a fish and she ate. The fish was fresh and fat, but without salt.

" All dead ? " asked the man.

" Dead—every one," Gerdruta answered him in the peasant tongue.

" Here, too," the man said.

They sat silent a while, secretly examining each other.

" I am Laes—Kadariku Laes—from yonder hut," said the man finally. " And thou ? "

" Gerdruta Carponai," replied Gerdruta.

And even as she spoke she was fully aware that who she might be was as little of account as the white cloud above her that melted in the sun.

The man only stirred the fire and said :

" From thy dress I saw thee to be a German. But now we are the only living in the whole parish."

" I saw thy footprints in the sand," Gerdruta said.

The man glanced at his sunburned brown feet and nodded.

" I went to carry water from the spring," he said.

Having finished their meal they set out for the cliffs.

Evening was already nigh.

On the summit of the cliffs dark-coloured late strawberries grew beneath the junipers that had been gnawed all over by sheep, though

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berrying time was long over.

They bent down to pick them, gave the largest, ripest berries to one another and ate.

The berries had a spiced and perfumed flavour. They ate a long time, like children, among the juniper bushes.

The setting sun, sinking towards the distant, invisible Ojumaa, shone in their faces, but there was no need for them to close their eyes against it. The sun floated in banks of warm grey mist, emitting no rays.

"What is it, that booming noise?" asked Gerdruta, curiously.

"There are other cliffs under the water," Laes explained. "One must pour ale and vodka into the sea there, otherwise there will be no luck in fishing."

They sat on the cliff's edge, sated with berries. Neither asked what was to follow. Beneath them was the cliff of slate, a hundred feet in height.

But for Gerdruta Carponai it was as though she had been born in a world altogether new.

It was a world she had never before visited. As in the former, here were air, land and sea, but the only mortals were they two, Kadariku Laes and Gerdruta Carponai.

The seagulls hovered over the water, with wings black in the shadow, a humming and murmuring arose from the grass. Everything in nature continued to live. But they two were the only human beings left.

There were no longer slaves or free; German or peasant, class or station. All the barriers man had built up during the centuries had gone.

Under a thick cluster of juniper quite close to them, a viper bathed in the failing sunshine. Laes noticed it at the same time as Gerdruta and in the same instant he had cut off a branch, split it at one end and caught the viper's head in it as in a vice.

Gerdruta saw the snake writhing at the end of the stick, yellow stomached, black stripes along its back, the forked tongue playing from its mouth.

Laes lifted it high into the air.

He did not kill it, however; instead he cast it away, far behind him.

"The grain stops growing if a snake is killed," he explained his action.

But as Laes cast the snake from him it was as though Gerdruta saw him for the first time, saw his youthful frame, thin with starvation, the fine firm line of his jaw and beneath it a horizontal scar with even edges as though from a blow with a knife—his nose, with wide

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nostrils, high and straight between his eyes, his hands, which in their strength resembled sledge-hammers. Neither the hempen robe nor the effects of hunger could hide the youthful strength of his body. Its every movement was swift, to the purpose, and economical of strength.

At the same time she became aware that Laes was deep in like contemplation of herself. As he looked on her she felt herself flushing red. Almost at the same moment they turned away in opposite directions.

After that they looked at each other no more.

They descended from the cliffs to the shore again. The surface of the rock was dotted with beds of rock-crystal, like the petrified nests of prehistoric birds. The sea was brightly smooth, its bottom paved with flat layers of rock like a floor.

There, on the deserted shore, in a country empty of human inhabitants, it came to both at once. Death rose to their brains as a mighty intoxication. They were drunk with it as with strong drink. Their youthful healthy bodies yearned unknowing each for the other, to create new life on the wasted earth. All the desolation they had seen burned in their brains, arousing in them both a strange passion.

There were only they two.

The sun had set when they returned to the hut of Laes. Laes, the fisher, opened the door and the highly-born Gerdruta Carponai entered. And in their fierce embrace on the bed of straw, their horror of death mingled with the yearning for life of generations yet to come. The world was empty and to these two fell the duty of re-peopling it, and they were as alone as the two first human beings were alone.

This is the tale of Gerdruta Carponai, during the year of the Black Death of Saaremaa. She had lived through a world hidden since the days of Paradise from men: a world without grades of value, without caste or class, without the many-coloured tinsel of man's devising, a world with two lovers dwelling in it alone.

As may be seen from the church registers for the time of the Great Northern War, the five sons of Kadariku Laes were baptized seven years later at midsummer, all at the same time. Their mother, Gerdruta Carponai, daughter of the former vicar of the parish, the worthy Magnus Carponai, and of his gentle-born wife, Beata von Krämer, had on the other hand to atone for her sin by sitting three Sundays following on the bench for immodest women in her father's church, for all to see, as the stern and uncompromising vicar of that time, Heinrich Bürger has with his own hand recorded in the church register.

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Whosoever wishes, may even today see this bench among the other lumber of the church : a low, wooden bench, fenced in like a pen.

After Gerdruta Carponai had thus publicly atoned for her sins in the sight of the whole congregation and received absolution at the altar, she was given in Christian wedlock to Kadariku Laes and taken again into the fold of the Church. From the mouth of the people one may hear that the whole present population of the parish had this couple to thank for its being, according to which they have increased within two centuries in far more wondrous measure than the children of Israel in Egypt.

* * *

ANSWERS to ISLAND MAGIC on page 21

1. *Aeaea, Circe's island, visited by Odysseus, in Homer's "Odyssey."*
2. *Jackson's Island, where the children camp in "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" by Mark Twain.*
3. *The Island of Shalott, in "The Lady of Shalott" by Lord Tennyson.*
4. *Monte Cristo, in "The Count of Monte Cristo" by Alexandre Dumas.*
5. *Prospero's island, in "The Tempest" by William Shakespeare.*
6. *Innisfree, in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" by W. B. Yeats.*
7. *Tahiti, where Strickland the artist lived and died, in "The Moon and Sixpence" by W. Somerset Maugham.*
8. *Britain, in "Rule Britannia" by James Thomson.*
9. *Ulva's Isle, in "Lord Ullin's Daughter" by Thomas Campbell.*

* * *

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 160

Across. 1, Forget-me-not. 8, Stem. 9, Needle. 12, Each. 13, Yale. 14, Imp. 15, Threaten. 17, Litter. 18, Embrace. 20, Artless. 24, Gutter. 26, Unfetter. 28, Rat. 29, Nail. 31, Data. 32, Mohair. 33, Soup. 34, Sleep walker.

Down. 2, Oath. 3, Gambit. 4, Tin mine. 5, Exemplar. 6, Oily. 7, Tentpegging. 8, Scarab. 10, East. 11, Terrestrial. 16, Ada. 19, Carriage. 21, Tie. 22, Entrap. 23, Outgrow. 25, Trim. 27, Fossil. 30, Loll. 31, Dude.

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POINT OF VIEW

I expect that woman will be the last thing civilized by man

GEORGE MEREDITH

Among the chaste virgins whom I saw in Alexandria there was one whom I estimated to be seventy years old, and all the Clergy testified concerning her that when a young woman, about twenty years old, she possessed exceeding beauty, and she was more looked at than many women, and because of her beauty *she fled lest she should become the cause of stumbling unto men.*

The Paradise of the Holy Fathers,
translated by E. A. WALLIS BUDGE

Any Mother to Any Daughter

Dozttur, seyde the good wyfe,
hyde thy legys whyte,
And schew not forth thy stret hossyn
to make men have de-lytt ;
Thow hit plese hem for a tym,
hit schall be thy de-spytt . . .

AUTHOR UNKNOWN, *Fifteenth Century*

All in Gratitude

Little Claus now climbed up on to the shed, where he turned and turned till he made himself comfortable, and it so happened that just as he lay he could see right into the room of the farmhouse, for the wooden shutters did not close at the top.

He saw a large table laid with wine and roast meat, besides a magnificent fish, the farmer's wife and the sexton sitting there all alone, and she filled his glass whilst he stuck his fork into the fish, for that was his favourite dish . . .

Just then he heard some one come riding along the road towards the house, which was the farmer coming home.

He was the very best-natured man, but had one peculiarity—he could not bear to see the sexton at his house. If he even met a sexton he at once got into a rage. That was the reason why the sexton had gone in to wish the woman a good evening, knowing her husband was from home, and she in gratitude had put all that good cheer before him ; but when she heard her husband, she was

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frightened and begged the sexton to get into a large empty box that stood in the room . . . The woman hastily hid all the eatables as well as the wine in the oven, for if her husband had seen them he would certainly have asked the reason for all those preparations . . .

" Is anyone up there ? " the farmer asked, looking up . . .

Little Claus then told him how he had lost his way, and begged for a night's lodging.

" Certainly," the farmer answered ; " but the first thing to do will be to get something to eat."

The wife received them cheerfully, laid the cloth for them, and brought a large bowl of oatmeal porridge. The farmer was hungry and ate with a right good appetite, but Little Claus could not help thinking of all the delicacies which he knew to be in the oven . . .

HANS ANDERSEN, 1805-1875, *Little Claus and Big Claus*

The Dancer

Because you are fair as souls of the lost are fair,
And your eyelids laugh with desire, and your laughing feet
Are winged with desire, and your hands are wanton, and sweet
Is the promise of love in your lips, and the rose in your hair
Sweet, unfaded, a promise sweet to be sought,
And the maze you tread is old as the world is old,
Therefore you hold me, body and soul, in your hold,
And time, as you dance, is not, and the world is as nought.

You dance, and I know the desire of all flesh, and the pain
Of all longing of body for body ; you beckon, repel,
Entreat, and entice, and bewilder, and build up the spell,
Link by link, with deliberate steps, of a flower-soft chain.
You laugh, and I know the despair, and you smile, and I know
The delight of your love, and the flower in your hair is a star.

It brightens, I follow ; it fades, and I see it afar ;
You pause : I awake ; have I dreamt ? was it longer ago
Than a dream that I saw you smile ? for you turn, you turn,
As a startled beast in the toils ; it is you that entreat,
Desperate, hating the coils that have fastened your feet,
The desire you desired that has come ; and your lips now yearn,
And your hands now ache, and your feet faint for love.
Longing has taken hold even on you,
You, the witch of desire ; and you pause, and anew
Your stillness moves, and you pause, and your hands move.

ARTHUR SYMONS

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All Else is Folly

Two different things wanteth the true man : danger and diversion. Therefore wanteth he woman, as the most dangerous plaything.

Man shall be trained for war, and woman for the recreation of the warrior ; all else is folly.

Too sweet fruits—these the warrior liketh not. Therefore liketh he woman ; —bitter is even the sweetest woman.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, 1844-1900,
Thus Spake Zarathustra

Not Fair

The Connacht men make a boast that Goll was the strongest . . . But the time Goll had the fight with Dearg Mor, that lasted through three days, Dearg Mor used to be brought away by the woman every night, and there was music and dancing and he got no rest, but Goll used to have his full sleep. And I don't think that was very fair dealing.

LADY GREGORY, 1859-1932,
The Kiltartan History Book

But In The End—After All—

Eve came to Adam, weeping through the clearing
(This was out of Eden when the gate was shut and sealed),
" Adam, I have hurt me, and badly, I am fearing ;
Fallen on a sharp stone beside the barley field."

But Adam did not heed her, weary from his toiling
And homesick for the Garden where had never been a stone.
So Eve gathered nettles and set the pot to boiling
And comforted and kissed him and bore her pain alone.

Adam came to Eve, once, when the day was pressing
Heavy on her heart that remembered other days ;
And " Eve," cried Adam, " quick ! This bruise wants dressing ;
And see the ugly blister that my sandals always raise !

" Is this a wifely welcome to hearten my returning ? " . . .
So Eve took her sorrow off and into strips she tore it
To make her man a bandage for his hurt and his yearning.
And thus she trained her daughters—and the Devil take her for it !

PHYLLIS MCGINLEY

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★*Told over and over again in Persian bazaar and Arabian caravan trail, the tales of "The Thousand Nights and One Night" descend to us from a remote, romantic past. And the half-fabulous world of moonlit gardens and mystery, love and lust, beauty, laughter and cruelty, is as enchanting to the modern reader as it was to the bedouin listener centuries ago. "The Chick-Pea Seller's Daughter," translated from the French version of J. C. Mardrus, is as lively and as piquant as any of the tales that held King Shahryar from sleep and Shahrazad's throat from the scimitar!*

THE CHICK-PEA SELLER'S DAUGHTER

Translated by

POWYS MATHERS

IT is related that there was once, in the city of Cairo, an honest and respectable chick-pea seller, to whom Allah had given three daughters. Though such could not usually be counted a blessing, the hawker received them with resignation and loved them dearly. This was the more easy as they were all as beautiful as moons, and as the youngest, who was called Zainah, was also an epitome of intelligence and charm.

The good man, wishing to fit them by education for a marriage above his own peripatetic class, spared every penny that he could afford for their teaching, and they would go every morning to learn embroidery upon silk and velvet from a mistress in that art.

Their way lay beneath the window of the Sultan's only son and, as they passed it each morning, a royal allurement with six Babylonian eyes snaring behind the little face veils, the youth would cry provocatively from his window: "Greeting to the chick-pea seller's daughters! Greeting to the three straight letters!" The eldest and the next would answer with a light smile of their eyes, but the youngest would pass on without even lifting her head.

Yet if the Sultan's son went further, asking, it may be, news of chick-peas and the current price of chick-peas and details of the sale of chick-peas and whether chick-peas in the abstract were good

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or bad, it was always Zainah who answered, without looking up: "And what have you to do with chick-peas, old pick-cheese?" And the three would hurry laughing upon their way.

The prince, who had grown to love little Zainah, grieved bitterly at her coldness and irony. One day, when she had mocked him more than usual, he realized that he would obtain nothing by his gallantry, and determined to punish the child through her father, whom he knew she greatly loved.

"She shall feel my power at last," he said.

As he was the Sultan's heir and had power over people, he called the chick-pea seller to him, saying: "You are the father of those three girls?" "I am, my lord," answered the trembling hawker, and the prince continued: "Tomorrow morning at the hour of prayer I require you to return here, at the same time dressed and naked, laughing and weeping at the same time, and at the same time riding and walking. If you come as you are, or fail in only one of the conditions, your head shall answer for it!"

The poor chick-pea seller kissed the earth and departed, complaining bitterly to himself that his fate was sealed.

He came back into the presence of his daughters with the sack of his stomach turned upon him and his nose trailing to the ground. The girls noticed his perplexity and little Zainah asked the reason of it.

"My child," he answered, "a calamity has come upon me and my breast is straitened with sorrow." Then he told her of his interview with the prince in all its details; but nothing would be gained by repeating them in this place.

Zainah heard her father through to the end and then exclaimed, with a laugh: "Is that all, dear father? If you follow my advice in this matter, you need have no fear at all. Also we shall make that silly prince burst from disappointment. To fulfil the first condition, you have only to borrow a net from our neighbour, the fisherman, and I will make you a garment of it to wear without anything else. Thus you will be clothed and naked at the same time.

"For the second condition, you must take an onion with you to the palace and rub your eyes with it on the threshold; then you will be able to laugh and weep at the same time.

"The third condition is just as easy to satisfy, dear father. You have only to go to our neighbour, the donkey boy, and borrow his little ass's foal. Then you can enter the presence of that young ruffian with the foal between your legs and your feet touching the ground; that is to say, both riding and walking. Such is my advice; but Allah knows all!"

The chick-pea seller kissed Zainah between the eyes, saying: "O daughter of your father and mother, who has such children

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does not die! Glory be to Him Who has planted so much intelligence behind your brow and such sagacity within your soul!"

The world grew white before his eyes, care fled from his heart, and the fans of his bosom ceased from contracting. He ate and drank, and then went forth to make the preparations which his daughter had suggested.

Next morning the chick-pea seller entered the palace, clothed and naked, laughing and weeping, riding and walking, while the frightened ass's colt brayed among the royal company. The prince felt his gall bladder like to burst against his liver, but he was obliged to send the hawker away in safety. At the same time he swore to be revenged, this time upon the girl herself. We will leave him cudgelling his brains for a plan, and return to young Zainah.

As she had a far-seeing eye and a nose for the future, Zainah foresaw that the prince's next move would be against herself. "Better attack than wait to be attacked," she said, and straightway went forth to the shop of a clever armourer.

After greeting, she said: "O father of skilful hands, I wish you to make me a complete suit of armour all in steel, with thigh pieces, armlets, and helmet of the same. And you must so construct it that, at the least movement or touch, each piece will make a deafening noise and terrifying clatter." The armourer set to work at once and, in a short time, delivered exactly the suit which the young girl required.

When night fell, Zainah terribly disguised herself in her iron garment, provided herself with a pair of scissors and a razor, and, taking up a large pitchfork, made her way towards the palace.

As she came along the road, the door-keeper and guards fled in all directions; as she passed into the palace, the slaves and eunuchs, terrified by her appearance, scurried into dark holes and corners, and remained there. Thus she was able to pass through corridors and come to that chamber to which the prince had retired for the night.

The young man, hearing the frightful noise of the armour and seeing the wearer of it in the half-light, supposed that some Ifrit had come for his soul. His face became yellow, his teeth chattered, and he fell to the floor, crying: "Spare me, spare me, O powerful Ifrit, and Allah shall spare you!"

"Keep your lips and jaws very, very still!" answered the chick-pea seller's daughter in a voice of thunder. "Otherwise I will thrust this fork into your eye!"

The prince breathed no more words and lay without movement or resistance, while the girl shaved the half of his young moustaches, the left side of his beard, the right side of his head, and both his

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eyebrows. Finally she left as she had come, for no man dared to bar her way. As soon as she reached home, she hid away her armour and, lying down beside her sisters, fell into a deep sleep.

The next day, as usual, the three sisters, well washed, coifed, and dressed, left for the house of their embroidery mistress and passed under the prince's window. He sat there, in his daily position, but his face and head were muffled up in silk, so that only his eyes were visible. Contrary to their custom, the three looked at him with insistent coquetry, so that he said to himself: "*I think that I am taming them at last. It must be that my eyes are more attractive when the rest is hidden.*"

"O three straight letters," he called down to them, "O daughters of my heart, how are the chick-peas this morning?"

The youngest lifted her head and answered for her sisters: "Greeting, O muffle-face! How are the beard and moustaches this morning? How are the lovely eyebrows?"

Then the three girls broke into laughter and ran on, with mocking and exciting gestures.

The prince understood that the Ifrit of the night before had been little Zainah; he felt his gall bladder rising to his nose, and swore that he would be even with the girl or die. He waited until his beard, moustaches, brows and hair had grown again and then sent for the chick-pea seller, to whom he said: "O man, I wish you to give me the hand of your third daughter in marriage, for my heart is lost to her. If you dare to refuse your head shall answer for it."

"It is permitted," answered the hawker, "but I pray that our master, the prince, will allow me time to consult the child before I finally consent."

"Certainly, ask her permission," cried the prince, "but remember that her refusal will mean a black death for both of you."

The unfortunate man hurried home and told his daughter of the prince's command; but she laughed, saying: "As Allah lives, there is no calamity in that! The marriage will be a godsend to us all. I consent most readily."

The chick-pea seller returned to the palace with this answer, and the Sultan's son rejoiced. Again we will leave him, this time making preparations for the marriage, and return to Zainah.

As soon as her father left the house, Zainah hastened to the shop of an expert confectioner, whose chief skill was in the manufacture of sugar dolls. "O father of light fingers," she said, "I wish a sugar doll which shall be a life-sized portrait of myself, with hair of spun candy, deep black eyes, a little mouth, a small pretty nose, long lashes, and all that is fitting in other places."

Straightway the confectioner collected his material and made so

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wonderful a resemblance of Zainah, that it only lacked speech for its humanity.

When the wedding night came, Zainah dressed the doll in her own chemise, laid it with the help of her sisters in the bed, and lowered the light curtain about it. Then she gave final instruction to the others, and hid herself behind the bed.

As soon as it was time, the two sisters went for the bridegroom and introduced him to the marriage chamber. They gave him the usual wishes and recommendations: "She is delicate! We trust her to you! She is gentle and sweet, you will have no fault to find!" and then retired.

The Sultan's son, as he stood by the bed, remembered all the slights which his bride had put upon him and all the angers which he had felt against her. With a quick movement he unsheathed his great sword and struck at the body through the curtain, so strongly that the head flew into pieces. One morsel entered his mouth, open for cursing, and the sweetness of its taste astonished him. "By my life," he cried, "she is passing sweet in death!"

Racked with remorse, he would have passed the sword through his own belly, but little Zainah slipped from her hiding-place and held his arms from behind, embracing him and saying: "If we forgive each other, Allah will forgive us both!"

The prince forgot his rancour when he saw the exquisite smiling of the child. He pardoned her and loved her, and they lived in all delight, leaving a numberless posterity behind them.

* * *

SO WINGS MY LOVE

Even as the honey-bee, dizzied by the nectar and the height,
Sways on the long purple bloom,
So did I sway upon the rapture of my love.

Borne up by the shifting winds
I looked upon the intoxicating sun
And laughed my joy into the evanescent air.
I danced along the sunbeams and ran along the rays.

From out the shimmering rain-drops I surveyed my world,
Secure, untouched, untouchable.
Safe in my impenetrable bubble of happiness.

AILSA PURDIE

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HARRIET ADAMS, high-spirited daughter of the founder of the Culver and Adams shipping company, has come of age in the firm and made her stand against its present head, her guardian, ROBERT CULVER.

Culver harbours a bitter grudge against his old colleague AMOS DE LOACH, whom he thought responsible for the public unveiling of the hideous dragon-bird figurehead instead of Culver's own likeness—and against the new-launched barque, "GERRYMANDER."

He engages CAPTAIN BOLL to run the "Gerrymander" and "drive her to death," but when Boll re-opens old wounds by making a fast sailing record, Culver, accompanied by Harriet, sails to the Indies resolved to dismiss him. Harriet helps to persuade Culver to give Boll a second chance.

Meanwhile Harriet meets TOM FLINT, first mate of the "Gerrymander," and narrator of the story. Flint is in the pay of De Loach whose new firm, he now learns, is being secretly financed by Harriet, after Culver has brought him to ruin. He falls in love with Harriet, and is dismayed to hear that Culver has proposed to her.

Culver and Harriet return to Boston, leaving Boll involved in endless difficulties. Deep in his fantastic scheme to foist a worthless coinage, the Gerrymander Cash, on the East Indies' natives, he is at odds with the Dutch. He has exceeded the circulation they had been persuaded to guarantee, and the Dutch now only await proof. Apparently deserted by ST. EBENEZER, his partner-in-crime, Boll murders an English adventurer, Captain Steele, who endangers the scheme. And in the

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The fourth part of

FAIR WIND TO JAVA

by GARLAND ROARK

meantime he is also awaiting trial by the Dutch for buying a beautiful slave girl, Kim Kim.

A further threat lies in the great pirate Pulo Besar; and Boll, inviting the moment of decision, sails in a chartered craft through the pirate-infested waters with a false lure, eight gold-covered lead bars. He is captured by the pirates.

The Story Continues

* *

IN Bira Bay we anchored in deep fathoms a hundred yards from the beach. Hundreds of natives under turban and tarboosh moved about in sarongs, short cottons pants and Moslem gowns.

Soon four Malays carrying iron swords boarded us while their companions looked on. And while one of the fierce-visaged foursome stood guard on deck, the others searched the ship for almost an hour. They departed, and another group repeated the search, to no avail. Boll had hidden the counterfeit bars well, and for a purpose—the harder they were to find, the more golden our lead would appear.

As the evening rolled in over the gulf, a fleet of big *praus* moved into the bay. Songs, prayers to Allah, and piercing cries lent the harbour and beach a piratical atmosphere absent during the day. Towards midnight an old pirate came aboard with a prize crew,

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unlashed our schooner, and manœuvred it into the stream. Several hours later a narrow passage up the coast opened into a hidden kidney-shaped lagoon: we were in the Lagoon of Lor, which opened its pass to accept more than thirty ships before the dawn.

Morning broke clear. The shadows fell long and sharp, and seemed in no hurry to retreat from that scene of rare beauty, limpid turquoise water and a circular white beach lined with overleaning coconut palms. Beneath the palms a forest of huge banana and taro leaves caught patches of light, sheeted flame where the sun broke solidly through, and, across the water, the scene accepted the subtle gradations of distance as dark hills rose above the morning mists and stood up for inland horizons.

They found our "gold" bars that morning. A great cry went up when a young *Hadji* emerged with a bar of our gold held high above his head. The pirates on the beach praised Allah, each man anticipating his share of the booty to be divided that evening. Boll and I watched with open curiosity the direction taken by the bearers of our metal, since it was logical to assume that such a treasure would proceed directly to the pirate chief. It moved into a boat, where it was rowed diagonally across the lagoon to a huge thatch from which bright orange-and-green canopies extended.

THE day climbed to its zenith, and I decided to take a stroll up the beach.

The orange of the canopy protruding from the big thatch seemed incongruous to the colour scheme. It advanced to meet me like the orange spot on a huge woolly spider. Just ahead and off the beach was the slave camp, from which I heard sounds of weeping. Beyond the shed, and screened from view, was the prisoners' compound.

As I drew nearer I could easily understand why there was no watch posted about that wealth of booty; the very fact that it was unguarded sent a shiver up my spine—he who ventured near broke the inviolate rule of piracy. The punishment was not a lovely death, I had heard. I pretended not to see it as I moved on past. But I had no sooner put the place behind me that I heard my name called from a jungle of taro leaves. I was standing still when the huge green leaves rustled and a bull of a man stepped out to leer at me.

He was none other than the captain from whom Boll had purchased Kim Kim: K'ung K'ung!

He wore the same black sea cap and white trousers; and he was barefooted, as we had seen him in Batavia. I stood with fists on hips, trying to get used to the sight of him there. With nothing to say, I kept my mouth shut and eyed him soberly, thoughtfully. That he should suddenly appear like some jinn provoked a suspicion into an almost certain fact—Hoppo Two, his employer, was either Pulo Besar or else he was on good terms with him.

"Have wait you since leave ship. Wise to pass that, you," he said, jerking his massive head towards the thatch. "But come, I show Merrycan treasure to eyes pop."

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He laughed, scratched his uncovered middle, and moved towards the thatch. As we walked, he laughed gutturally and asked, "Where girl you capyteen steal from K'ung K'ung?"

"We left her in Soerabaja," I replied. He laughed from deep inside him and slapped me hard on the back, as if to drive home the fact that we were brothers of a joke. I laughed, too, saying, "Did Pulo Besar enjoy the joke?"

"Pulo Besar?" he said. "Some mebby day meet Pulo Besar."

I thought it strange that he had access to the treasure if he did not know the pirate. But he entered the long thatch with all the assurance of the great pirate himself, and led me to the centre of the display before sweeping his arms in a wide circle and saying, "Long money here, Merrycan." Nor did he joke.

Surrounding me was concentrated wealth, riches that left me awestruck. I saw a large gold lattice with the complicated designs of Javanese art cut into its sides; a dozen like it, in gold and silver, were piled on the ground like worthless shells beside intricately fashioned gold tobacco and betel boxes; swords and spear tips of solid gold, as well as nosepieces for humans and animals, were heaped alongside silver and gold necklaces and bracelets; behind me the gold and silver filigree from Makassar's silverworkers touched a cask overflowing with European jewellery, diamonds, and other precious stones; and I saw British, Dutch, French, and American coins of silver and gold, as well as stacks of paper money.

I saw only seven of our eight "gold" bars.

"We go," K'ung K'ung said. We departed abruptly, moving to the beach where an aged boat and a pair of oars sent us out into the lagoon and towards the only *prau* flying the black flag. I felt a surge of excitement at the thought of meeting Pulo Besar soon. I was now sure the pirate was none other than Hoppo Two.

We boarded the *prau*. On the high poop under a white canopy sat one man. He turned to eye us as we drew near. K'ung K'ung bowed low, saying, "This him, O my master Hoppo Two."

THE man before me possessed a wealth of authority in his intelligent face. He sat on a short stool with his thin legs crossed in Chinese fashion, and smoked steadily, thoughtfully, from a hubble-bubble pipe. He was dressed in occidental manner, from English shoes to cravat, though a long queue and strings of a moustache, the latter falling from above the corners of his mouth to his shirt, augmented his slant eyes and saffron colour to pronounce him Chinese. Hoppo Two was lean of face and body, and long-fingered; his nails were long and pointed like claws.

"Be seated, Mr. Flint." His English was free of any oriental inflection. "You are thinking," he said, "that I am Pulo Besar."

"Yes," I replied. "I've thought so for some time."

He smiled. "So do others. But let them think so."

"Well," I replied, "the only black flag here flies above you."

He said easily, "The flag is every trusted merchant's escort once a year. I come to buy. Before evening others will come—merchants,

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rajahs, and sultans. Since I was the first to finance the great Pulo Besar, I am favoured."

"Then who is he?" I asked.

"He is Pulo Besar, the best investment of my successful career." He paused. "And I am a businessman who wishes to talk business."

"There's Captain Boll over there on the schooner. He's the head of our enterprise."

"True. Now were it a month in the past, I'd send for him. But since it is today, and today rushes to meet tomorrow, say that I am a man of business who is not interested in talking to tomorrow's corpse."

I chuckled to cover my rising sense of shock. "Now, Mr. Hoppo Two, it seems you underrate Captain Boll."

"Captain Boll," he said slowly, "is a man with a prodigious imagination and great striking force; he is worthy of respect. He is also the owner of a great idea; at least Pulo Besar thinks so. But he has earned Pulo Besar's wrath. Listen:

"The schooner *Stamford Raffles* was seen two weeks ago blowing towards the reefs of Doangdoangan Ketjil. She struck the reef and filled fast. There was not a soul aboard her; her wheel was lashed, and there was dry blood in her cabin." He stroked his thin moustache. "Captain Steele was Pulo Besar's favourite," he added.

"You invited yourselves here through a most childish byplay in van Kirsteen's office. Since you intended to visit the great Pulo Besar, he was kind enough to intercept you in the Strait of Salajar. Did you not think it odd that you were not boarded before Bira, thereby giving you ample opportunity to heave your gold overboard? And the very fact that you did not throw your treasure over proved that you were either willing to pay a price to meet Pulo Besar, or that you actually carried no treasure."

"Now that could make sense," I said, "or—"

"But your gold, Mr. Flint, didn't make sense. It was fool's gold, which brings up a timely question—what business have I to talk over with you?" He paused. "Today, in appreciation of our profitable relationship, Pulo Besar sent me a gift. It was a gold bar."

He clapped his hand and two Chinese servants appeared. He ordered them to fetch "the crucible."

The two servants returned with a round brass container, which they placed before the master. At his order, the lid was removed. "Look, Mr. Flint." I did so; I saw molten lead.

"One does not refuse a gift from Pulo Besar. If he gives what he thinks is gold, Mr. Flint, it must for ever be accepted as gold. Therefore, by all the laws of wisdom, which surely govern politic behaviour, we are now looking at gold. And since we are not so foolish as to look at hot lead, we must say that our intelligence is in need of a certain adjusting agent which will reconcile the discerning eye to the eye of profound wisdom. Do you follow me, Mr. Flint?"

"I'm not sure that I do. But it will require a miracle to turn that into yellow gold."

"On the contrary, Mr. Flint, you can do just that."

"I?"

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"Yes," he said, smiling. "Who better than the *Gerrymander*'s future captain can turn lead into the equivalent of a gold bar in American dollars?"

He studied me for some time. "Since Captain Boll will not survive the night, Mr. Flint, and since it is customary for a first mate to take command with the death of the captain, you will become the master of the *Gerrymander*. You follow me, of course.

"The value of the *Gerrymander* and her present cargo far exceeds fifty thousand dollars, Mr. Flint. You, as captain, will naturally be interested in saving the ship from Pulo Besar, who has little compunction about burning ships. Is this correct?"

"Yes, assuming, of course—"

"We are past assumptions, Captain Flint. Mr. Culver will be coming to the Indies for the trial of Captain Boll. You, as captain, will present him with Pulo Besar's demand for fifty thousand dollars."

"That," I said, covering my bewilderment with a grin, "is a pretty steep price for one lead bar."

"You forget"—he smiled—"there are eight bars. I'm afraid the sum I ask would be raised if Pulo Besar knew of this little joke."

"Yes," I said. "Yes."

"I shall expect your acceptance or refusal of this proposition before the festivities of the evening, Mr. Flint—or Captain Flint." He stood to signify that the interview had ended.

I got to my feet. "So Pulo Besar wants fifty thousand dollars."

"No—I want the fifty thousand. Pulo Besar is taking over Captain Boll's trade-money enterprise." I thought that was odd, since only a few of us knew the real secret of the Gerrymander Cash. I said nothing, so he added, "I shall prevail on Pulo Besar to work with me on the ransom of your ship."

I grinned knowingly. "You won't have far to go to prevail on him, will you?"

He replied, bowing low, "Not too far, Mr. Flint." He watched me get into the boat after K'ung K'ung. Then he said lazily, "Suppose you tell Captain Boll that we are looking forward to this evening when he, if he runs true to form, will dig his own grave."

K'UNG K'UNG rowed me back in silence. I saw the *Fire Wind* to the south before the promontory screened it from view. There stood Boll just as I had left him. "So Boll is tomorrow's corpse. We'll see what the Striker thinks about digging his own grave."

I was soon aboard the schooner and leaning on the rail next to Boll. "It was quite interesting," I said. "You'll think so, too." Thereupon I told him all, slowly, carefully, in an effort to capture the every inflection of Hoppo Two's voiced threat.

"Mr. Flint," he said at last, "if I were you, I'd accept Mr. Hoppo Two's proposition in a hurry. Let him think you're eager to get on the right side."

"Maybe I am," I said tentatively.

"Sure. Maybe you are." He turned slowly and faced me. "But I don't think so. However, I'd accept, and put Hoppo Two's

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mind to working lazily over fat profits instead of schemes. He'll tell Pulo Besar, and—"

"Pulo Besar? He is Pulo Besar!" I exclaimed.

Boll replied, "Mr. Flint, when you're sure, tell me again."

"Then who is Pulo Besar?"

"I'm not sure. But I intend to find out."

I TOOK Chess with me. Soon the hull of the *prau* stood high above us, and the imperious face of Hoppo Two peered down in silence. "I've decided to accept your proposition," I said.

"The wise live to prosper," came the reply.

Chess and I worked through the maze of *soppés* that suddenly put out from the far shore for late afternoon racing. They put us off course, and we beached the boat some distance from the schooner. I had no sooner put my feet on the sand than I saw a bearded Moslem under turban and dirty robe staring at me. Suddenly he winked an eye and lowered the robe which covered half his face.

I wanted to shout, though I merely whispered, "St. Ebenezer!" It was Chess who cried out in surprise. "Well, I'll be—" My hand was over his mouth before he could say more.

St. Ebenezer frowned, jerking his eyes towards the schooner as he did so. He stayed close behind us as we weaved through the crowd. Once on deck, I told Boll what I had seen, and he led the way to the cabin. "Now, perhaps, we'll learn something," he said.

St. Ebenezer was not long in arriving. He entered cautiously, looked about, and threw the latch on the door. Then he tossed the robe aside and sank to a chair with a tremendous sigh. "A drink! By God and St. Ebenezer, I've been a son of Allah long enough!" He gulped two drinks before cocking his head with a question, "What in the name of international sin are you two doing here?"

"They caught us at Salajar," Boll replied. "We were carrying British gold to Darwin."

"Gold? Where's the *Gerrymander?* Oh, Makassar." He poured another glass. "Well, the errors of mankind are confined to no individual or race. I, gentlemen, am in a hell of a situation also."

"So they got you," I said. "Before or after you got to Timor?"

"Before. And I have been through a rare assortment of hells. The worst came when they said that you, Captain, had disposed of Captain Steele. I felt the thong and hide, and I was put on a salt-water diet for days. But pain is as ordinary as joy—the only difference in the sensations one experiences is purely of the mind. St. Ebenezer said it." He eyed Boll slowly, then me, and Boll again. "Yes, I suffered because this Captain Steele was eliminated.

"But I learned much. I lay in the hot, stinking hold of a ship in chains while the Great Bastard chopped up the Soerabaja sea lanes. I almost escaped at Tomea, and—listen to this—with full knowledge that the Lagoon of Lor was the rendezvous! If we could have gone to the Dutch with that, Captain, I'm sure they would have closed their sleepy eyes on the Kim Kim mistake."

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"Be more careful with your wording," Boll said. "A mistake, in my opinion, is a mistake only after all the cards are down."

St. Ebenezer winked an eye at me, touched his fingers to forehead, and bowed. "My mistake," he said. "But what's your fate?"

"We don't know," Boll snapped, "except that Hoppo Two told Flint I was doomed to die tonight."

St. Ebenezer chuckled, and peered at Boll. "And just what are you going to do about it—die?"

"I haven't made up my mind yet," Boll said drolly. "But answer me this: who is Pulo Besar?"

St. Ebenezer's great eyes glanced off into space, and his hands, the same long, classical hands—unlike any I had ever before seen—lifted until all ten finger tips touched. "I tried to answer that in Makassar," he said. "First I suspected van Kirsteen. But he did not possess the brains. Then I turned a curious eye on Hoppo Two, who has brains. The two combined form a seeing eye and a brain. Therefore, since brains and vision rule the world, it is only natural to assume that they together constitute the legend of Pulo Besar."

"You do pretty well with your theories," Boll said. "But I was told by an old Moslem that only one man sits up on a great improvised throne and hands down decisions."

"I have heard that also," St. Ebenezer said thoughtfully. "I have heard, too, that the Sultan of Bandjermasin might be the Great Bastard. But my choice, if Pulo Besar is one man, is Hoppo Two. He has been openly accused, and never has he denied the charge."

"I'll join you there," I said. "But who are his twenty captains?"

St. Ebenezer shrugged and said, "Talk does not lessen my predicament. I'm a fugitive, gentlemen, from the prisoners' compound." When asked where the predicament lay, he replied, "They'll miss me. The guard will count thirty-nine prisoners soon. The fortieth is here."

"And if you're caught?" Boll said.

"I know too much to go free," the old adventurer said. "And unless someone confesses to the murder of Captain Steele, they'll think I know too much to live." Boll's sharp eyes pierced him in the instant; and St. Ebenezer's big eyes hardened with a look I had never seen before. Then he raised his glass. "Since none of us, except perhaps Mr. Flint, stands much chance of seeing another sunrise, suppose we drink to the other side of the sky or ground."

"I'm not ready for that," Boll said, rising. "I'm going for a walk. Suppose you come along, Mr. Flint." At the door he said to St. Ebenezer, "You'll be safe here while I follow a hunch that might save all of us."

Once on deck, he said, "We're going to the prisoners' compound." When I asked why, he replied, "To enlist thirty-nine other prisoners, maybe. Tell Chess to keep a sharp eye out. You'll keep your distance behind me, and wait on the dog-leg spur."

I waited for some time before he returned. He moved on past me without any sign of recognition in the twilight, weaving his way through the horde of human beings bowing to the west. On deck

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he said nothing. He moved carelessly towards the cabin, emitting a single lone chuckle as he rapped on the door.

"What I learned will interest St. Ebenezer," he said, rapping again. Then he tried the door and it yielded. We had expected to find St. Ebenezer behind a locked door with a glass of gin in his hand and big-worded philosophy on his brilliant, anxious tongue. But we were due for a surprise:

Instead of our self-styled saint, we found Chess unconscious. When he came around, he remembered nothing except a sharp blow on the head.

Outside the last chant of Moslem prayers droned, "Allah! Allah!"

THE Arabs felt the coming excitement of evening as the setting sun rolled on towards Borneo.

The dais for Pulo Besar was rising up on the sand with its back to the jungle wall. Huge pillars of wood were propped up and fastened at the top with curved beams. Then a huge platform for the throne was put in place under these, and a series of steps fell into place to form a stairway thirty feet or more in length. Torches, as yet unlighted, were spaced some twenty feet apart, circling from Pulo Besar's throne to the water, a good two hundred feet away. The throne faced Mecca and the dying sun.

I saw turbaned men draping batik from the structure, while others spread oriental rugs over the platform floor and down the steps. Soon the throne sat atop the platform; the seat from which the great pirate would hand down decisions was a box upon which was printed, KRUPP ESSEN. It was covered with batik in another moment.

Night fell fast over the lagoon, and under torchlight Moslem and pirate, hot-blooded and alert, milled by the hundreds. The stage leaped into view in the light of a score of torches. We had been favoured with an excellent view. From our schooner's port bow, the dais and central stage of white sand lay just over the rail. Our prize seats were not ours alone; a dozen visitors, sultans and rajahs who had come to buy, were escorted to the rail alongside us. They were seated on silk-covered crates and improvised benches.

Soon we saw men pulling ropes hard by the lagoon. Out in the dancing water the torches outlined the *prau* of Mr. Hoppo Two. Then another great *prau* drew abreast of Hoppo Two's and squatted there with merchants from Makassar, Ternate, and Amboina.

As I searched the decks of both *praus* for a glimpse of a familiar face—Hoppo Two's or van Kirsteen's—a grinning Malay bowed low and showed a paper, upon which he said was inscribed the names of our prominent visitors. He had been sent to translate the ceremonies and auctions. How very thoughtful of Pulo Besar, I thought. The Malay began to read from his sheet in the torchlight:

"*The Sultan of Sandakan.*" The Sultan nodded and we bowed. "*The Sultan of Batakan.*" The same procedure followed until all of the Borneo visitors except one were introduced. Then came the great surprise: "*The Sultan of Bandjermasin.*"

Boll and I peered at the huge bearded face we had seen at the

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hearing in Soerabaja. It was framed by a white Kashmir shawl embroidered in purple and gold; the rich piece flowed out of a white turban. He wore a large ruby pin on a band at his forehead. But he scarcely moved a muscle as he pierced us with sharp eyes.

The translator said to Boll, "They are interested in your yellow money." Boll was soon passing cash pieces among them and talking up trade. I frowned, comparing him to an insatiable octopus who will try to eat a little of the enemy that is killing him.

Below, there was the first sign of activity. An escort of men armed with spears made an opening in the crowd, through which a dozen others made their way with heaping trays of mutton, dried fish, cakes, and fruit, large round loaves of sago bread, and whole sides of buffalo fresh from a spit. I was suddenly very hungry.

On the heels of the food bearers came the officials of the mosque of Bira. They marched to the sides of the carpeted steps and raised their hands. Then, without a break in the ebb and flow of preparations, two Malays brought up a long beam, thin, and curved like a buffalo horn, decorated with intricate carving, and embellished with scrolls and flowers standing above it. This piece was supported by two poles planted at the side of the dais, and it served as the pulpit from which the Koranic texts would soon be read.

The Caliph stepped forward and spoke. He read from the Koran and then chanted: *Mohammed saw an angel with seventy thousand heads, and in each head were seventy thousand tongues, and each tongue spoke with seventy thousand voices at once. Heaven was made up of many heavens, one of solid silver, one of solid gold, another of precious stones, but in each the faithful enjoyed music, wine, and maidens, as well as the face of Allah. . . .*

The vast audience cried, "Allah! Allah! Allah!"

With a final shout to Allah, the festivity ended, and food was passed to all. I tore into a whole loaf of bread and a huge piece of buffalo meat with great enjoyment, still looking for van Kirsteen and Hoppo Two as I did so.

Then I saw the former on the merchant's *prau*, and I turned to Boll, who had refused to eat. But Boll was busy, very busy—he was tossing coins atop the heads of the surprised Moslems and doing a bit of low chanting himself: "A wind, Lucifer, a wind!" Nor did he pause when a great shout split the air over the Lagoon of Lor and a score of armed Malays escorted one man to the carpeted steps of the dais. "A wind, Lucifer, a gale!" he said, as Pulo Besar, the Great Bastard, moved to his throne.

Van Kirsteen's face glowed in the torchlight from the craft next to us, and I knew he was not the notorious pirate. Neither was the Sultan of Bandjermasin. So Hoppo Two, by virtue of his absence, was Pulo Besar! Or was he? Further conjecture was futile in the tense hush that followed. Every eye dug into the half-concealed face of the brown man who occupied the box throne, who sat perfectly still as he slowly scanned the audience from left to right. I glanced at Boll. He stared also, though in his thin, sharp eyes I saw more than ordinary interest: a glowing calm and fierceness.

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I could not hear the great pirate's voice as he spoke. But the speech in Malay was relayed by bull-throated men, and on to us by way of our translator: he called his governing board of captains, we were told; and when the six appeared, he extolled them, saying in conclusion, "I shall reward all twenty of my captains through you later. And now, fetch the prisoners before me."

The first prisoner to stand in the centre of the clearing was a tall Malay with a proud head and erect shoulders. He heard the charge from one of the pirate captains: "He, of Bula Bula, it was said, reported the presence of my ship in a cove to a Dutch officer. A *Hadji* says it is so. The curse of Allah upon him, O Master."

Pulo Besar asked the prisoner if this were so. "Upon the Koran, no. Allah knows me the innocent victim of the captain's anger. I fought him when he tried to sleep with my wife."

"Did he sleep with her?"

"He did. He is not a son of Mohammed. He is a pig! May he be doomed to live on the thorn of the rattan for seven eternities. I spit in his face." Thereupon the *Hadji* witness was called, as well as the wife of the accused. Then the decision from Pulo Besar:

"This man is not guilty. Pay him twenty pieces of gold from the accusing captain's shares and set him free tomorrow at Bula Bula." Then he allowed the accused the privilege of divorcing his wife, and a great cheer went up.

The next prisoner was a huge fierce-visaged man who wore gold earrings, turban, and breechclout. His crime was piracy! He had plundered a Dutch schooner. Said Pulo Besar: "Piracy is the highest crime. Independent acts of piracy do not go unpunished by Pulo Besar. They are dangerous, because they are always laid to me. Nor do I get my share of the loot. Piracy in Indonesia must come under my jurisdiction. Now why did you not join the great federation?" The man said he did not know how to find Pulo Besar.

"But you have found me," came the mocking reply. "And too late for your own good. You will hang." In another moment the offender marched between two guards to the prisoners' compound and a waiting hangman.

"Justice!" The cry rose up. "Pulo Besar is just!" There was no mistaking the man's strong hold over his followers. Pulo Besar, I realized, was indeed a great man.

One by one the prisoners appeared. I was beginning to wonder if Boll had bypassed an opportunity in which the prisoners might serve us. He had spoken of such when he visited the compound. But as the prisoners slowly met with deserved or perverted justice, I realized he would get no aid from that source. Theft was punished with forty lashes, murder with death by fire, and rape by the severing of a man's virile organ.

I said to Boll: "I haven't seen Hoppo Two this evening. But if I had a telescope, I could soon tell if he is Pulo Besar." Boll asked how, and I replied, "By his long fingernails." He was not long in borrowing one from a sultan; Pulo Besar, however, had drawn his hands inside

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his robe by that time. And at that moment I heard the crier's call for the last prisoner: "St. Ebenezer of Singapore!"

THE crier sounded that magic name again. There was a strained silence, and then a babble of voices from near the throne. As sultan and rajah leaned forward in rapt attention, Boll chuckled. I glanced sharply at him, though the raised voice of Pulo Besar caused me to turn an alert ear in the moment. His voice was familiar and then it wasn't. And the telltale fingers, if the pirate were Hoppo Two, remained hidden by the robe.

Boll turned to study Chess speculatively for a time; he said at last: "Boy, you could earn my good will if you tried." Chess was no more surprised than I when Boll said, "The back of that throne is against the jungle. It's unguarded. If you could slip through the crowd and climb that palm behind where Pulo Besar sits . . ."

He held a pistol between his waist and the rail. He held Chess with his eyes. I saw resentment leap up in Chess's face; and I wanted to pin a medal on him when he replied bravely, "I'm not mad at Pulo Besar, sir. He never made me ride a bosun's chair."

Boll merely studied the lad. He did not so much as glance at me when I laughed.

As a cradle-shaped moon lifted through the latticed palms, the crier announced the slave sale.

A grinning auctioneer claimed all attention; he was a two-hundred-and-fifty-pound Turk who wore a red tarboosh and red balloon pants tied with a sash of golden silk. Never have I seen a man of his size move with such verve and grace. He swung a long sword and a short tasselled whip. "I, by Allah"—he laughed—"shall grow rich tonight or else I shall be hanged poor. The captains' slaves, all fresh and in good health, all firm and fleshy, will soon parade before you. Bid, tuans, bid high. Concubines and dancers for rajah and sultan, and any man who can pay the price."

The male slaves entered and stood up for appraisal. A savage from Formosa with tattooed moustache stood more than six feet in height. He was quickly purchased by a merchant of Ternate, who doubled the bid voiced by a sultan. Next a Polynesian girl: "Firm flesh, beauty; see her brown skin and white teeth, O buyers, and her round teats—she can suckle many offspring." The jolly auctioneer jerked the robe from her breasts and ordered her to dance.

"Thirty guilders!" The auctioneer scoffed and put her aside, which pleased the crowd. Then a voice spoke up, "One hundred." She brought three times the amount a quarter hour later.

Pulo Besar sat like a statue as the revenue from each sale was heaped at his feet. Twice I had studied him under the telescope, and soon a third opportunity came. His hands snaked out of his robe for a moment, though they were lost to me almost instantly.

And now the last course, out of which I felt that climaxes long overdue must surely spring, or else the threat hanging over Boll was but an idle bluff. Twenty pirate captains were standing before Pulo Besar and bowing. Fourteen squatted on the sand while six, who

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made up the governing board, moved halfway up the steps. At the same time a score of dugouts moved in and out of the lagoon on the far side of Hoppo Two's *prau* with the treasure of the thatch. The sight was more than impressive: all that wealth of gold, silver, and jewels piled high on rich oriental carpets and gleaming like some dazzling dream out of the *Arabian Nights*.

The sight was but a symbol of the Great Bastard's power, of the man who ironically sat on a cheap crate labelled: KRUPP ESSEN. But then, I realized, no throne could be better suited for its metaphor, the powder keg of the Greater and Lesser Sundas.

Fortunes were quickly divided: six parts for division among twenty captains and their crews, and the seventh for Pulo Besar. Then the crews raced forward to transport their wealth to twenty ships. The stage was soon free of loot; only Pulo Besar's share remained. The captains advanced once more and bowed. Pulo Besar spoke, and six captains stepped forward to receive the "gold" bars we had brought from Makassar. Boll chuckled.

In that moment Pulo Besar lifted his hands and held them suspended as if he blessed his satellites. I brought the telescope to my eye in a hurry. If I saw long clawlike fingernails, my surmise would prove correct. The long-awaited opportunity came; it fairly leaped the distance separating us and drove hard into my eye with the answer. I looked again, as if my mind doubted what I had seen. I clutched at Boll's arm and said, "Well, I know now that Hoppo Two is not Pulo Besar."

And Boll, with culpable indifference, replied, "I've known that for some time, Mr. Flint."

I scarcely heard Boll's reply as I studied the hands that rose up from Pulo Besar's lap once more. Ten finger tips touched, moved apart and together again in meditative gesture. In the moment I knew the true identity of the great pirate.

Even then I could not believe what I knew to be a fact.

I said to Boll, "It's small wonder St. Ebenezer didn't answer. He's up there on Pulo Besar's throne!"

Boll said, "I've had my suspicions since I visited the prisoners' compound. There wasn't any fortieth or escaped prisoner."

I wasn't ready for the next surprise. But it came when the Turk in balloon pants raced into the arena ahead of a dancing girl. For the pirate chief had reached deep into his bag of secret treasure for a gem most likely to fascinate every eye as well as to provoke Boll into "digging his own grave," as Hoppo Two had put it. She was beauty itself, tropical and sultry, clad in a brilliant sarong of red silk dappled with large white flowers. The piece of cloth was familiar.

Then Chess cried out his surprise: "By God, that's Kim Kim!"

She was Kim Kim.

BOLL's reaction was reminiscent of rolling thunder over a horizon; he churned fury inside him with almost his usual economy of motion. There was every reason for his hate to nurse desire for murder, since Kim Kim's presence and probable sale once more

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could only reveal an astounding plot—a perpetual swindle by the Sultan of Bandjermasin under the protecting wing of Pulo Besar. Kim Kim's buyer would feel the Dutch pincers in due time. And Boll, whose trial loomed over him, felt the pressure of the moment.

The crux had arrived. It involved Tom Flint, since a far-reaching decision was due from him. I had to decide which would serve me better, St. Ebenezer or Boll. Hoppo Two's proposition had in effect meant that St. Ebenezer had suggested my rôle in milking Culver of ransom money; and that rôle would serve De Loach and me in more ways than one. Perhaps it was just the opportunity I needed.

In my debate, I saw St. Ebenezer's soft eyes grow cold.

I seemed to hear him again as he spoke of skulls and prosperity with a devilish glee—a skull up on a pole with a Gerrymander Cash in its teeth! He, allied with the lawlessness and evil of the Indies, its far-reaching brains and force, was not a partner who would serve me for long. I made my decision quickly: I chose Boll.

With that decision, I said to Boll, "I'd go slow here, since I think this is what Hoppo Two meant about your digging your own grave."

He did not surprise me when he replied, "To hell with him."

Kim Kim went into her dance. There was a tenuous beauty in her oriental face, where the ecstasy of a spell cast by some pagan muse enhanced the sleepy, natural melody of line and colour. Her body was bare but for the sarong about her hips, which, with arms lifted above her head, she sent into maddening circles and ellipses.

Boll's hands gripped the rail as if he felt a spell that subordinated his coin-tossing séances with a devil. Chess leaned over the rail, his eyes glued to her. "Damn, but she's beautiful!" he said over and over, drawing Boll's eye at last.

"You know what will happen to her, don't you, boy?" Boll said. Chess looked up, curious. Boll showed the pistol again as he said, "They'll sell her to some Arab, that's what."

Chess eyed the pistol, hypnotized. He was torn between fear, doubt and a desire to save her. Then he turned to me. "Shall I, sir?"

I studied him. Then I eyed the throne against the jungle, the single palm lifting behind the great pirate, wondering if he could make his way there without forfeiting his life. "You're a good lad, Chess," I said.

"If you say so, sir, I'll do it. There's damn little I wouldn't do for you."

"It's up to you," I replied. Then I faced Boll. "What will we gain if Pulo Besar dies?"

"Nothing, Mr. Flint. But if he should feel a pistol at his back at just the right moment we might gain a lot." He faced Chess, who stared at the black jungle behind the throne, and said, "The right moment will be when I mention the name of St. Ebenezer."

"St. Ebenezer?" Chess repeated in a daze. Then slowly he took Boll's pistol and placed it in his blouse. "Good luck, Chess," I murmured. He was soon lost in the crowd.

As Boll and I faced the show once more, Kim Kim folded her body until her head touched the sand. Her feet remained in fixed

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position, the same as before and during her performance. The dance was over, though the spell lingered. It was broken by the ugly intrusion of a voice, the auctioneer's: "She is for sale. Do I hear a voice? Do I hear, by Allah, a thousand guilders?"

"A thousand guilders!" The sound leaped from the deck of the *prau* next to us, where van Kirsteen sat. I saw the owner of that voice arise; he wore a flaming vermilion turban alive with pearls and topped with a frontlet of white gold and diamonds.

"The Rajah of Mataram," said the translator. Further appraisal was cut short when I heard Boll's voice:

"Eleven hundred guilders."

"Twelve!" cried the Rajah of Mataram; and Boll said easily, "Thirteen." In moments the bidding reached two thousand guilders.

"Twenty-one," Boll said in dead level tone of voice.

"Twenty-five!" shouted the Rajah, hoping to silence Boll.

"Twenty-six."

Mataram's ruler, used to having his way, studied Boll with fierce imperious eyes, before leaping over the stern of the *prau* to the beach. On the sand, he cried, "Three thousand."

In another moment, Boll leaped to the sand and stood in the central arena. "Thirty-one hundred," he said.

Kim Kim started when she saw him. Soon the figure climbed dizzily upward from four to five thousand, and then six. The Rajah paced the beach like a Bengal tiger and sent the bid soaring to seven thousand guilders. It was a tense moment. Out of the hush, Boll's voice gave off with: "Seventy-one hundred."

"Eight thousand!" The Rajah was more than angry.

"Eighty-one hundred."

"Nine thousand!" the Rajah said. He paced the ground near the steps of Pulo Besar's throne, and Boll moved closer. "Who is this man?" the Rajah asked in simple exasperation. Pulo Besar answered him: "Captain Boll of the American ship *Gerrymander*."

The Rajah sneered: "Boll? The man who trades with strange money? So. And does he propose to pay for her in worthless money?"

For reply, Pulo Besar said, "Let us hope so."

"Yes." The Rajah smiled thoughtfully for some time. "Then I shall make a final bid of ten thousand guilders."

Boll paused to eye Kim Kim, the Rajah, the auctioneer, and Pulo Besar, all in sober meditation. He seemed to consider the situation from every angle before speaking with inspired ease: "Ten thousand and one guilders."

He had bought Kim Kim again, if only for short minutes; and she anxious and woman, rushed up to him. I saw her arms creep sinuously about his shoulders and neck. Then Boll did something which seemed to dwarf the many surprises he had dealt me—he ran his hands over her back tenderly before crushing her to him and pressing his lips against hers.

WHEN the Turk extended his hands, palms up, for the sum of ten thousand and one guilders, Boll said, "Draw up a note for the

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money, payable in Makassar within three days."

The Turk, nonplussed, turned to Pulo Besar, who said, " I am very patient, Captain Boll, but I have never been called a fool."

" My note is good for ten times the sum," Boll argued. I realized that he knew the utter futility of words at this time, that he was slowly working into his own game.

" But your note is no good here. Pulo Besar does not rob ships of notes. You have five minutes, Captain, or the girl goes over to the Rajah of Mataram."

" Since you trusted me to pay twenty-five thousand American dollars for ten thousand cash pieces," said Boll, " why do you baulk at this small sum ? "

" Because, Captain, I no longer trust you for the first sum mentioned. The memory of Captain Steele is too fresh for that. And now that you have forced yourself among us, guilty of murdering one of us, you dare to challenge the inviolate rule of auction."

" So you do not trust me," Boll chuckled. " I brought along enough gold to pay your every demand twice, did I not ? " Here was a ticklish question : unless Hoppo Two played his game single-handed, St. Ebenezer would know that the bars of gold were lead.

" It seems that you have made a great mistake," Pulo Besar said. " But it is not your first, is it, Captain ? Let us say that it is your last."

" I seldom make mistakes," Boll replied, eyeing the robed man on the throne.

" No ? " came the slow reply. " Then I will send for Mr. Flint."

I was soon standing beside Boll on a lower step. " Now," Pulo Besar said, " I want you to meet your successor, Captain Flint of the *Gerrymander*, whom I may appoint as manager of my newest enterprise, the cash-piece trade." He paused for effect. " Not only can I make money out of your cash piece, I can milk the shipowner of thousands more than the petty sum you agreed to pay for the cash pieces in Makassar. Now can you say you have made no mistake ? "

" Yes," Boll said, playing for his moment. " I've long known Mr. Flint for the damned traitor he is."

Pulo Besar was at that moment exulting over his victim : " Your knowledge of Mr. Flint's prudent duplicity, Captain, does not alter the situation in the least. The murderer of Captain Steele will soon rot in his grave while the man whom you call a traitor will prosper."

Boll spoke to me out of a corner of his mouth : " He can't afford to be unmasked, and he doesn't know that we know him. Work up as close as possible to him." This meant that we should manœuvre so as not to be too heavily outnumbered when Boll called his name.

" Come, Captain, and learn your fate. I am trying to think of a death worse than that of lying over a bed of voracious ants, or swinging from a deck to the sharks, where you're snatched back after losing a foot. I have heard that crabs pinch live meat slowly from a man staked in the sand, that they work inside you through the tenderest parts of the anatomy."

Boll passed the six captains and their " gold " bars and walked up to the throne. I saw the two giant Malays who hovered close to Pulo

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Besar lean forward with their spears as Boll drew near; they held their rigid pose. All the time I was measuring distances from every side, wondering if Chess had reached his position as planned. I lit a cigarette and moved casually past the six captains and on up the steps. And there I stood not ten feet away from Pulo Besar.

Then Boll raised a hand. "May I have a word with your captains before you sentence me?"

Pulo Besar replied, in the true voice of St. Ebenezer, it seemed, "A man about to die should be humoured." I stood by, ready—for exactly what I did not know. Boll turned around and faced the captains, who squatted with their "gold" bars.

"*Tuan*," he said, pointing to the largest of the captains, "is your chief here a believer?"

"He is a true son of Allah."

"No, he is not. He would be killed if caught in Mecca." There was mocking laughter among the captains. Then he said, "Is that gold you have there, or is it lead?" They laughed louder, and I heard Pulo Besar join them. The great chief's laughter lent me fresh hope, since here was proof of a house divided—Hoppo Two was playing a single-handed game. Boll said: "If you will scrape the surface of your bars, you will find lead."

They shrugged, grinned, and decided to humour a fool about to die. One forced a knife point into a bar and leaped back with an exclamation. Suddenly all were hacking at the metal. Then they looked up at the throne, their sober faces alive with foolish expressions.

"Pulo Besar cheated you," Boll said slowly, as if every word he spoke must count. "He will cheat you again, for he is not one of you. Do you want to know who he actually is?" Out of the tense silence, Boll said:

"Now he could be Allah, or even St. Ebenezer of Singapore."

That did it. Curiosity is universal, and Pulo Besar knew it. I expected the order that came, and I wondered if Chess had managed to reach the position behind the throne. I was watching St. Ebenezer closely when he sounded the order: "Seize him!"

I saw him stiffen and turn his head slowly, a sure sign that Chess was there.

The order of the Great Bastard went unheeded: the crowd remained silent as it awaited some explanation from the six paralysed captains. Boll's words—"He would be killed if caught in Mecca. He will cheat you again, for he is not one of you"—were forcibly underlined by bars of lead where gold should be—and gold, or its sudden disappearance, speaks in a strong voice among all men.

As the largest of the captains broke the hush of silence and asked the great chief for some explanation concerning the bars, Boll said to me, "Get Kim Kim. Up the steps with her, quick!"

Then he turned to Pulo Besar and said, "Tell your captains that you did not know you were cheating them, St. Ebenezer."

There he sat—St. Ebenezer in the rôle of the greatest pirate of the Indies—afraid. He feared the mob with any admission of error on the part of a man who had never condoned error; and he feared

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the gun at his back. He played for time, for some miracle to save the situation. All the while the crowd seethed.

I brought Kim Kim up the steps almost unnoticed. We were close to the throne when St. Ebenezer raised the hands of Pulo Besar. When a hush fell over the crowd, he cried: "Captains!" Then he fell forward with all the speed of a mongoose, crying out at the top of his voice, "Seize them!" Chess fired, but too late.

Somehow I managed to dive between the two Malay spearmen who charged Boll. I struck Pulo Besar's arm just as he fired. The bullet, aimed at Boll's heart, struck his shoulder, spinning him around. Then the gun was aimed at me before I had an opportunity to tear it from the enraged pirate. Boll had rushed the two guards. As I glanced up, a spear in his hand was driven through the body of one of them. The Malay stared wildly, and collapsed for his last spasmodic jerks. The other lost his balance and was impaled by his own spear when he fell to the sand. The gun still smoked in Pulo Besar's hand from the shot intended for me, when I heard Boll's cry: "Grab Pulo Besar! To the jungle!"

The great throng was in wild uproar: pirate and Moslem sent up deafening cries as they charged in a body. They raced for the throne, trampling torches underfoot and throwing the whole scene into sudden darkness. Whether their spears were meant for us or for Pulo Besar, I did not know. The effect was all the same, as I leaped with St. Ebenezer from the top of the steps to the jungle floor. Boll had gone ahead of me: he was lifting Kim Kim from the ground when I stumbled upon him. Chess spoke for all when he cried, "Let's get the hell away from here!" St. Ebenezer, unable to fathom the temper of the mob, ran with us.

We stumbled through vines and bushes in the darkness of a steaming jungle. The noise of the arena faded behind us; but as we stopped to see if we were pursued, a great cry went up:

The dais had collapsed.

WE halted in a clearing where huge banana leaves stood in silhouette against the serene tropical sky.

We sat in silence for some time—Boll, Kim Kim, Chess, and I; and our prisoner, who had until minutes before been the greatest pirate of the Indies, brooded over his loss.

Chess broke the spell of night over a close-pressing jungle with, "By God and St. Ebenezer, I've lived on this day!"

"You did right well by yourself, boy," Boll said. "You came through at the right time."

"Aye, sir," Chess replied. "If I do say so myself."

Boll's shoulder was bleeding profusely, and it was Kim Kim who busied herself with the wound. She stuffed a part of Boll's shirt into the hole and bound it fast around the shoulder and underarm.

Boll faced each of us in the pale starlight: first me, then Chess, Kim Kim, and at last St. Ebenezer. He chuckled and said, "Pulo Besar." There was no answer, and after a time he got to his feet.

"You'll come with me. We've got to work fast." When I asked

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what he meant, he replied, "If we wait until daybreak, we'll never get Pulo Besar's share of the treasure."

"No!" I said amazed. "Haven't you had enough?"

"Mr. Flint" he barked, "I've been a captain a long time. And never have I failed to complete a voyage."

I, however, wasn't so anxious. I argued that we had our lives, which was more than I had expected to save. But Boll was adamant: "There's wealth back there, Mr. Flint. We're going after it."

We approached the beach warily and looked at the torches that gleamed anew. Through the screen of bush and tree separating us from the wreck of the dais, we took in the scene at a glance.

Near us a dozen prostrate figures lay, some with spears in their backs and bellies. Beyond the deserted wreckage, small groups argued. Amid shouts and brandished weapons, one Moslem or pirate would dart away from one group to join another. The *prau* from which van Kirsteen and his merchant guests had watched the show was moving out into the lagoon. Our schooner, the *Fire Wind*, sat quiet and deserted. Our Malay crew had either turned pirate or made their escape.

Only Hoppo Two's *prau* seemed alive. It had not moved. We saw K'ung K'ung and the crew; and Hoppo Two sat there smoking his hubble-bubble pipe as if nothing had happened. His eyes dwelled on the wreck of the dais, as did Boll's: Pulo Besar's share of the wealth lay among the twisted planks and dead bodies.

We waited. Soon a score of pirates approached the tangled ruins and pointed. Boll said, "They won't touch it until they decide on a leader." He added, "We will."

K'ung K'ung left Hoppo Two and moved from one group to another. Before long, a sizable crowd had gathered on the beach at the stern of Hoppo Two's *prau*. Then, as the minutes passed, many of the pirates from the boats, as well as those who had gone to the canopied thatch, joined the throng at Hoppo Two's craft. The Rajah of Bandjermasin appeared on the deck. Then van Kirsteen took his place next to the Chinese.

"A new Pulo Besar will emerge," Boll said. I thought of Hoppo Two's threat to Boll. I had wondered why he had not told Pulo Besar of the value of our bars, though I was beginning to understand his reasons for silence: and had Boll not advised the captains of their loss, Hoppo Two would have done so in his own devious manner later. It all boiled down to this: he coveted the profits of Pulo Besar; he wanted to head the vast piratical organization which St. Ebenezer had created.

Boll said to St. Ebenezer, "Hoppo Two must have known I would not go down without a fight. We served him well, didn't we—Pulo Besar?" He seemed to enjoy St. Ebenezer's curses as the palaver at the *prau* drew closer to the inevitable conclusion, a Chinese victory.

St. Ebenezer's tone was almost pleading as he said, "Captain Boll, if you'll allow me to walk out there, you'll never regret it."

"You forget you're no longer in charge of your heathen," Boll

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taunted. "Hoppo Two is making a bid for your office. He knew about the lead bars, mighty Pulo Besar." He laughed, adding, "Just St. Ebenezer, a mere man, aren't you?"

"Gloat, damn you!" came the reply.

"You're nothing to gloat over." Boll's baiting tone persevered.

"God damn you, Captain!" St. Ebenezer's voice lifted incautiously.

Boll smiled. "So you want to walk out there. For what? To turn and run—or die? Surely, your lordship over cut-throats should present some better plan for, say, at least retrieving your fortune."

"For you?" St. Ebenezer growled.

"Why not? You were ready to take mine. But perhaps you'd rather see your successor take your share."

"What's on your mind?" St. Ebenezer snapped.

"Simply this," Boll answered readily, "if you dare to step out on the beach, let's make it pay. Now, listen—your captains didn't take ships with toy guns, did they?"

I saw St. Ebenezer's eyes narrow craftily. His small red lips spread into a thin smile as he eyed the largest *prau* at the pass on our left.

He bargained: "For my freedom and half the loot."

Boll looked down his sharp nose and said, "I'll make no promises."

He seemed to know that St. Ebenezer would hardly refuse any opportunity for him to restore his vast power and wealth.

Boll glanced at Chess and Kim Kim before saying, "There are five of us, St. Ebenezer. We'll need four Moslem robes and turbans." He pointed to the dead just outside the protecting screen of bushes.

"The dead serve the living," St. Ebenezer said, moving out into the open.

WE were soon covered with our robes and moving out of the jungle one after the other from different positions.

The new day was just under the faint horizon when we boarded the deserted *prau* that blocked the pass. The ship was not two hundred yards from where the crowd stood at rapt attention; it sat starboard beam to Hoppo Two's port beam. Beyond us two pirate craft were propped up on the beach without any life showing.

The two old guns on deck were at last hauled by rope tackles and pointed towards Hoppo Two's *prau*. This type of gun, a carronade, minus trunnions, was a close-quarter cannon. St. Ebenezer checked their loads, adding several lengths of chain to heighten their lethal effect. He chuckled in a cruel, vicious way as he worked.

A lonely lookout from a ship nearby shouted a warning. Hoppo Two got to his feet and called for silence. The lookout cried out again, causing van Kirsteen to point our way.

"They've seen us," St. Ebenezer said slowly. "Now let them feel us." A dozen men from Hoppo Two's group leaped for the cannon facing us broadside.

"Stand ready to load," St. Ebenezer barked. He held a match at the fuse to set off the charge. Boll ordered the Dutch flag run up, and then he gave the order to fire.

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Seconds later, the calm over the Lagoon of Lor was broken by the thunder from our first cannon. A darting tongue of fire and a quick curtain of acrid smoke, and the lagoon reverberated with echoes. As I ran forward to check our score, a cry, a blend of screams and anger, rose up from the throng up the beach. I saw Hoppo Two's *prau* rocking, a mast down, and her deck just abaft of midships raked clean by our shot. Men hung over the rail, dead, and others leaped about grotesquely. A few were running up to the carronade forward, though the greatest threat milled on the beach.

The throng, in wild disorder, was collecting itself for a charge. Just then Boll's cry, " Fire two ! " sounded ; and out of moments of throbbing suspense, a lick of yellow flame exploded deafeningly. I ran to help St. Ebenezer, not waiting to view the carnage wrought by that last shot.

" That one was dedicated to my faithful followers," St. Ebenezer cried. He was wrestling with the heavy gun in an effort to point its nose into the crowd.

" Hell, that's not necessary ! " I cried in protest. I pointed. " They're running now ! "

" Proceed," Boll ordered. " This is no time for pity. Mr. Flint, you'll look alive on the rope tackles here and help bring this gun into position. Then you'll see if you can raise some sail and stand ready to work her for a run if necessary." Kim Kim, afraid, and clinging to him, was brushed aside and ordered to help with the sails.

Then an answering charge sounded. It struck our *prau* at the poop with a thud. And from up the beach, a drone of angered voices preceded an ominous wave of humanity moving slowly in our direction. Our cannon spoke again : the heavy load of scrap metal and chain tore into the crowd. It stopped them momentarily as the advance ranks were levelled.

The morning seemed jarred up out of the east by pirate guns. The east was quickly lighting up to expose us, a mere few against a horde. As if to augment a heavenly light, Hoppo Two's deck seemed to explode in a shower of sparks. In the space of seconds, the deck glared redly, then the ship lay hidden behind sheets of flame.

" By God and St. Ebenezer, what beauty ! " It was the old " saint " revelling in his destructiveness. Boll, with three pirate rifles at his side, was picking off stragglers who tried to reach the cannon of other ships. Chess was swabbing the hot cannon. He sweated and grinned.

" They're coming again ! " I cried. I hauled sail in an endeavour to bring the ship around for cannon aim. Just then a loud explosion sounded from our portside. A mast went with it, and a load of grapeshot swept by us, taking everything in its path.

I saw St. Ebenezer pause and study the new threat. He reached slowly for a gun and raised it. A second later, the single Malay emerging from the pall of clearing smoke leaped high into the air.

" They're still coming ! " I yelled. Then, from across the lagoon, a cannon spat viciously. The bow of our ship felt the impact. Boll glanced from the distant *prau* to the surging crowd and took a chance.

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" She's got our range. Fire when you're ready! You, Mr. Flint, trim your sail and stand ready to slack away aft when we fire."

That was quite an order, but with the help of Chess, Kim Kim, and the seaward set of the current, we fulfilled it, one eye for the ship and the other for the pirates on the beach. They were drawing close, too close. The explosion came, and the distant *prau* struck at the water, listing quickly.

Our *prau* came around, swinging by her anchor until she crunched land. One cannonade, now on the crowd, belched, and that Moslem charge was broken. Those who could run disappeared into the jungle. The beach was clear; not a man showed himself in the morning light. But St. Ebenezer fired into the jungle, then at distant *praus*, as if his lust for battle remained unsatisfied.

We lay on deck, grimy and hungry until noon. We split hour watches, waiting for the attack from the remaining *praus* sure to finish all of us. Not one of us had the strength left to haul a sail; and so great was the damage to the gear, we could not have made any headway. But not a ship fired a gun that morning. We did not learn until later that Hoppo Two had been killed on his *prau*, or that van Kirsteen had fled. The great organization that had terrorized the sea lanes was without a leader.

Towards noon, Boll said, " The *Fire Wind* seems safe." He got to his feet with difficulty and staggered from the poop. Shirtless, his trousers torn, his tarboosh on the back of his head, and his face smeared and blood-streaked, he looked less the victor and more the vanquished. He roused St. Ebenezer and Chess and said to me:

" Cover me. I'm going after the treasure."

" You're too weak to swim the pass," I said.

He pointed to a dugout with outrigger. " Mr. Flint, if I were dead, I'd rise up for that much wealth."

I saw him weaving towards the wreck of the dais, a man ready to fall at his every step. I watched him as he crawled along in the ruins, lifting planks and stiff bodies in his search for treasure. He kept at it for hours, falling, getting up, and carrying on.

When the *Fire Wind* sailed out of the Lagoon of Lor late that afternoon, Boll collapsed on deck beside Pulo Besar's treasure.

CHESS and I set sail and pulled fast for the open sea. The Lagoon of Lor, with all its lush and gross beauty, ran out behind us as the shoaling waters of the pass raced under our keel. Soon the easy swells of the sleeping gulf rose up to embrace the schooner's hull.

Boll was lying as still as death on the portside. I eyed him for some time, at last meeting the frightened eyes of the girl who loved him for no more reason that I could imagine than his gift of red silk.

I was suddenly very lonely. I would have traded places with Boll then, if the girl watching over him were Harriet.

WITHOUT the aid of Chess, I might never have succeeded in bringing the *Fire Wind* up alongside the *Gerrymander* in the still harbour of Makassar. He was faithful and cheerful at a time when

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fatigue threatened all of us.

We cheered when the *Gerrymander*'s tall masts came into view. Then, amid the hustle of getting Boll and St. Ebenezer aboard the ship, we learned that the news of Pulo Besar's fall had preceded us. Makassar had celebrated the news two nights before; or, rather, one element celebrated while the other mourned. As Dutch officers, honest merchants, and sailors came to congratulate us, silent Moslems gathered on the beach to eye us with patient malevolence.

Boll's fever raged for a week. It slowly abated under Kim Kim's care. I was unable to persuade her to rest. Her caressing hands and lips, her odd prayers and strange songs, maternal at times, passionate at intervals, seemed to be the medicine Boll needed.

St. Ebenezer was up two days before Boll. He roamed the deck, a prisoner, though none of the crew knew why. Chess, the hero by his own tongue, savoured the secret of St. Ebenezer's dual rôle. It lent him a cosy importance.

Boll was walking the deck by the middle of July, his hollow eyes looking at the stretch of Makassar and far ahead.

Van Kirsteen had survived the battle in the Lagoon of Lor, though he did not return to Makassar until the evening of July twentieth. He hailed us from a *soppé* that came up to our stern just after dusk and asked for an interview with Boll. It was short and to the point, with Boll holding a figurative dagger at his fat throat until he signed a confession as to his part in sustaining Pulo Besar's piratical rule of the Indies. The confession served to guarantee his behaviour in the future: he agreed to appear in court with testimony against Pulo Besar and the Sultan of Bandjermasin; he agreed also to use his freedom in serving Boll and the Gerrymander Cash as he had served Pulo Besar.

VAN KIRSTEEN'S confession threatened to annul any advantage De Loach and I had gained. As I asked questions that only the future could answer, a letter from Harriet arrived by Chinese junk.

"Ten to one the news of Boll's indictment reached Boston," I said, opening the letter. Nor was I wrong:

Dear Tom,

Our friend warned me to brace myself for the news. Despite that, I wasn't prepared when the papers carried the story of Boll's indictment. His buying a girl! How horrible! Mr. Culver is furious. I am at my wit's end, since the news, which has shocked Boston and caused our friend a chuckle, has upset my plans for ending the long feud between them.

It is hard to assess Captain Boll's behaviour, since he has no cause to lure Mr. Culver to the Indies again.

Or does this baffling man brew fresh schemes?

What are your plans there? What does all this mean? Is the ship as involved as Mr. Culver thinks? I feel more and more dependent on you, Tom, and more in sympathy with your unenviable position. Is it cruel of me to interfere again with a request that you

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look about you for some way to serve all three of us : Mr. Culver, our friend, and me? This sounds impossible, I know, but I have such confidence in you that I dare ask it.

(Next day) : I have just returned from a conference with our friend. We are at odds, since he does not wish to give an inch of ground, now that he sees a chance to settle the score with Mr. Culver. If I had some lever, I might force him to make peace. But my threat to withdraw financial aid is of no avail. He reminds me of what he said when I came to his rescue.

Tom, the trap, as you call it, is closing in fast. News writers are clamouring for passage to the Indies to cover the trial. They're a merciless lot, and I shudder to think of what they will do to me if they uncovered my duplicity. The whole Figurehead Affair would be plastered over every paper as " The Harriet Adams Affair."

The " Aladdin " arrived today. Mr. Culver plans a fast easting down, with Mr. Cott as captain. This suits me. I am as anxious as Mr. Culver to reach the Indies.

I am anxious to see you, Tom. Perhaps you'll show me Soerabaja or Batavia. Aunt Emily warns that she will keep a sharper eye on us this time. And our stubborn friend on State Street grins wisely as he dares me to sway you from the fulfilment of your duty here.

Blossom sends her love.

Fondly yours,
Harriet.

" Bless you, Harriet ! " I said. " That's the sweetest letter yet. Blossom sends her love, and Harriet says, ' Fondly yours.' So she is more and more dependent on me, and she has such confidence in me that she asks the impossible of me.

" I'm beginning to believe Blossom was a good investment."

ONE week later we slipped the cable and sent the *Gerrymander* towards Batavia, where Boll planned to bargain with the Dutch over a most valuable item : Pulo Besar.

It was on the first night out that Boll called us in to " splice the mainbrace," which meant a social chat was in order.

The hard eyes of Robert Culver looked out of the portrait and saw Boll, St. Ebenezer, Mr. Wulsin, the Bosun, and Tom Flint seated around the gleaming table.

He began with Mr. Wulsin ; he called his name and waited until the old bosun was hopped up with suspense before saying :

" St. Ebenezer was Pulo Besar."

Wulsin eyed the self-styled saint with eyes that reached up for the very pinnacle of shock before taking a dive to the depths. All he said was, " The Lord and St. Ebenezer ! " St. Ebenezer chuckled.

Boll said, " Mr. Flint, have you noticed how our partners in the cash dwindle ? " He eyed St. Ebenezer at length. " So you were the Great Bastard," he said, his voice like drumbeats in a strained silence. " You're a man to be admired. Or rather you were. Now let's hear you talk. What was the secret of your dual rôle ? "

" I was St. Ebenezer in beard, and Pulo Besar without it. I

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learned to wear a false one on the stage in Liverpool years ago. It served me well. Only my hands gave me away." He glanced at his beautiful hands. "I'd never thought of them as Judases."

I wedged in a question: "How could you govern piracy and travel with us at the same time?"

"That was simple. I had twenty loyal captains; and a dozen spies, like van Kirsteen. I stepped into the rôle of Pulo Besar even when I was in Ende and other ports with you. I was quite a genius St. Ebenezer says it."

"So does Tom Flint say it," I replied.

"Now here's a nice question," Boll said. "Why were you so anxious to draw my blood slowly?"

"There were two reasons for that, Captain Boll. First, I wanted the cash-piece trade for myself; and since you were the type of man who seemed unmanageable while alive, I wanted you dead.

"The second and big reason, you killed Captain Steele."

"So what?" Boll snapped.

St. Ebenezer's great eyes hardened, then softened as he said, "My name is Steele, Captain. He was my son."

The statement fell upon my ears like some slow shock to already numbed senses. Boll's eyes narrowed for a moment before his face assumed an expression that said he stared at unalterable destinies as if they were but fruits in season for his plucking.

As the ex-lord of the pirates glowered from his chair, Boll drew a sharp conclusion: "Since you've lost nearly everything, you might as well lose the rest. Where's your fortune hidden?"

"I'm an unusual pirate. It isn't hidden. Most of it is in a London bank."

"A little out of reach," Boll said thoughtfully.

The pirate in St. Ebenezer wasn't quite dead, however. He reminded Boll of an item which was worthy of consideration—he knew the secret of the Gerrymander Cash, and he knew that there were too many in circulation. He said, "So I'll trade with you."

Boll was ready with an answer: "You haven't much to trade."

"You amuse me, Captain. Suppose we get down to cases. You've had your fun, and I know you're not about to miss the glory of bringing in Pulo Besar. So I'll help you out of the Kim Kim mistake and say nothing of your cash-piece trade if you'll keep the secret of my true identity. That's all I ask."

Boll said, surprised, "How can you help?"

"Easily. Captain, I am a student of human nature. Man is both a lucrative and disappointing subject. He is seldom baffling, and after a time he is therefore uninteresting. But not you, Captain Boll.

"Now while in Singapore I went to all sorts of trouble to interest you in what is generally a man's downfall. A woman. But I was unable to find a living creature made of solid gold—literally, sir. Flesh was not your weakness, it seemed. And yet, you had to have a weakness other than greed for money. But you did not drink to excess, and you were not half as cruel as you pretended.

"A woman was the logical answer. She is the bait that eventually

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lures. So I conceived the idea of dressing up the lure with profit. I gambled that, if you were presented with the problem of purchasing a woman, the woman would, somehow, strike a harmony with your sense of profit. It was not a fantastic idea, as the case proved.

" The Sultan of Bandjermasin and Hoppo Two were willing tools. I sent K'ung K'ung to you with the order to sell Kim Kim to one man—you, Captain Boll." Boll glared; St. Ebenezer chuckled as he raised his glass and said, " To the mighty Captain Boll."

IN Batavia, on the fifth of August, Boll reached up for dizzy heights. He went all the way to the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, and in the manner of a king, rather than a mere mortal. Before a dozen high officials, he was the Striker again. He opened his case with such impolicy that I was sure he was his own worst enemy. " I'm not here to ask for any favour, mijnheers, so you can erase the lordly expressions from your faces. I'm here to trade." He paused. " I have captured Pulo Besar."

The ruler of the Dutch East Indies blinked his eyelids in fatuous manner. " *Neen!* " he said.

Boll replied, " It is true. Now what's he worth to you? If you don't want him, say so, and I'll trade with him. He'll pay dearly for his freedom and another chance to sail your seas."

A dozen voices sounded and then died away to one with the question Boll played for: " What do you want? "

" You might think I'd ask you to dismiss the slave-trading charge in Soerabaja. But I won't, and here's why." He told of the planned swindle conducted by Pulo Besar and the Sultan of Bandjermasin, at last chuckling and saying, " I can prove it, which will force the hasty Dutch Government of these parts into the embarrassing position of punishing a pet sultan and precipitating a war."

The host of officials were due for sharp surprise here. They listened to the annoying American captain as he voiced the name of van Kirsteen of Makassar, and even Pulo Besar, both of whom would appear on his behalf, he said, to swear that the wily old Arab of Bandjermasin had sold Kim Kim to him in Batavia; that the Sultan had put her up for sale again in the Lagoon of Lor.

" Who bought her this time? " the Governor General asked.

" I did," Boll replied.

They had never seen such a man. " If you are not asking us to dismiss the case against you, what do you want? "

" Freedom to trade with my Gerrymander Cash pieces."

The Governor General asked us to retire while they considered his demands. We obliged, only to be advised upon our return that we would be notified of their decision within a fortnight.

Boll eyed them cynically. " I'm afraid, mijnheers, you don't want Pulo Besar as much as I thought you did. My ship sails tomorrow for Soerabaja."

Outside Boll grinned lazily and said, " Ten to one they don't want a war in Borneo, Mr. Flint."

At nine that evening four Dutch soldiers escorted a Government

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messenger aboard the *Gerrymander*. In the captain's cabin, he presented a letter from the Governor General. It was as follows:

KAPITEIN BOLL, *Geachte Herr:*

The Government of der Nederlandsch Oost Indië has, after due consideration of every aspect of the case, reached a decision in your favour. The charge against you, set for trial in September, will be quietly dismissed, provided, of course, you deliver the pirate Pulo Besar to Dutch authorities at once.

Regarding the cash-piece trade, which our Government feels to be incongruous with Dutch economy, a further though limited concession will be made on your behalf. You may double the sum of your guarantee at the Javasche Bank, realizing that the Government will prosecute relentlessly when and if one item of your trade money above the posted guarantee is redeemed at the Javasche Bank.

Boll grinned as I heaved a mighty sigh of resignation. My partnership in De Loach and Company seemed to disappear with the flourishing signature of the big man of the Indies.

WITH the delivery of Pulo Besar to the Governor General himself, Boll seemed to reach up with prodigious ease and snag his dazzling star. Fame was his, and he strutted into and out of the bars of Batavia and Soerabaja, the intrepid captain and adventurer who set sailing records first and conquered pirates later.

He had made a fair wind to Java.

And out for gain, he shed a part of his glory and let it fall on the Gerrymander Cash. The cash trade was free of a bit in its teeth, and he planned to scud before the winds of a gale to reap new fortunes. And the Rajah of Mataram had sent him an invitation to visit his palace in Lombok.

We hoisted the dripping anchor early on a morning in late August and pulled under easy sail through the East Gat for Madoera Strait and the Bali Zee.

WE entered Alas Strait at sunrise, and we were through it to the Indian Ocean before the noon breeze blew in. And that breeze swept us under the rugged coast in high water, full and change at a fast clip which we held almost to Mataram. The reefs were threaded on the Ampenan Road and we entered the mouth of the Jangkok River for safe anchorage. The palace of the Rajah of Mataram was less than a mile upstream.

But Boll was in no hurry. "We'll sit it out," he said, "and wait for Culver, and a welcome from over there." His thumb pointed in the direction of Mataram.

The welcome came early on the following morning. A pompous Balinese overlord in a European carriage arrived with a guard carrying guns that had seen service in the German invasion of France in 'seventy. He presented himself as Prime Minister of Bali and Lombok, and said our arrival was not only a pleasant surprise, but that it was timely also. He presented Boll with a sealed letter.

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" We shall send for you tomorrow," he said, " when the sun sinks over the enchanted island of Bali."

With the sunset of the next day a sixty-foot schooner with a gilded hull under hard varnish, and sails of silk in red and yellow patchwork, moved towards the *Gerrymander*. Uniformed sailors, in identical waist-sarongs of many-hued batik, stood the deck like marionettes and sat at the oars on each side of the craft.

As Boll and I sat alone near the stern of the craft, Boll surprised me with: " Mr. Flint, Culver's picture is coming down—fast."

" Now that's interesting." I said. " But I've often wondered what you hold against Culver."

" I hold nothing against Culver. He merely owns the *Gerrymander*, which I want, and which I'll get. But we'll have to sail mighty close to the wind." He faced me squarely in the tropic twilight and said, " It's time you put your cards down. Who's paying you ? "

I hedged, asking why that information was so important. " Because Culver is on his way here for a showdown. And the Rajah of Mataram sent another letter yesterday. He has a proposition."

" What sort of a proposition ? "

" That I don't know, though I'm sure it's one he'll try to twist around to his advantage. But that is only natural in this world."

" Or any other," I added, grinning. " Now take me for example. I'm tempted to disclose my motive—purely for what it is worth to me."

" Perhaps I can help you," Boll suggested.

" That's what I'm talking about. But I'll wait."

" Have it your way," Boll replied.

The schooner was soon around the bend of the Jangkok and sliding along to the dock. It was dark now, and I saw the palace, a huge mass of stone, in silhouette against the evening sky. But another sight lay still and threatening just ahead of the Rajah's luxurious craft:

A heavily armed Dutch schooner.

Her lights blinked off and on as uniformed men moved about her on deck: and she flew a flag of truce under the official Government ensign. I said to Boll, " Odd, isn't it ? "

He shrugged and led the way on up the dim terraces to the palace.

Boll was quickly received, though I was asked to sit in a small room to await presentation to the Rajah. After an hour, the overlord returned for me and led the way to a room lined with twelve guards. From this room, which was hung with tapestries in gold, silver, and crimson, I entered the Rajah's office. The Rajah, a man no older than Boll, sat on a great throne, a dozen feet in length, with pillows at his back, flanked by mace-bearers and officers of his guard.

He eyed me in silence as I stepped forward, bowed stiffly, and said, " I am Tom Flint, Your Highness. We met at the Lagoon of Lor."

" Yes," he replied absently.

The Prime Minister advanced and bowed. He announced the presence of His Dutch Majesty's Minister, van Kleegermarq. " Let him wait," the Rajah answered. " I cannot work myself into a warlike mood for peacemaking when I am busy with more profitable business." As the official bowed and departed, he turned to me again.

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"You and your small band handle pirate carronade well." I grinned, drawing from him, "I wonder if you could distinguish yourselves as well for profit as for your lives."

"We left with profit, Your Highness," I replied.

The Rajah rubbed a lip with a forefinger, glancing from me to Boll and back again. "Profit, indeed," he said without any semblance of a smile, "and a lovely dancing girl."

Boll studied the prince for some time before surprising me with, "Rajah, Mr. Flint will be glad to hear of your proposition."

He said, "The situation is simply this: Culver will be here soon, hoping to relieve me of command because I have inadvertently embarrassed the firm." I saw the Rajah's eyes widen and thin with interest at this remark. Boll talked on:

"The Rajah here has as his guests a number of rajahs, sultans, and rich merchants, who do not want to see piracy abolished for several reasons: first, because the Dutch need their law-enforcement eyes diverted from their fiefs; second, the rajahs and merchants can buy better from a pirate; third, a pirate is a balance wheel between the hotheaded element and the rulers—he can insure peace when and where the rajahs want peace, without any Government red tape.

"The guests have voted eleven to one for a new Pulo Besar. The dissenting vote was cast by the Sultan of Bandjermasin. They will finance the venture with boats, men, and money; they agree to advance the man of their choice one hundred thousand dollars." He paused to sip his drink before literally overwhelming me with his next words. "But I want a better rôle, Mr. Flint."

"You!" I exclaimed.

"I," Boll replied calmly.

Boll's part in this new development had a spurious ring. In the first place, piracy offered less gain and more risk than his present venture. Atop that, knowing Boll as I did, I realized that I would be the last man he would tell of this owing to my undisclosed mission. Therefore, he was playing some game with the wily Rajah.

"The better rôle is just this, Mr. Flint. But first I'll say the Rajah and I don't see eye to eye in this case."

"Captain Boll wants all," the Rajah interpolated, smiling wickedly across the small table at Boll, then at me.

Boll ignored us, saying, "I can handle the pirate end of the deal, as I'll explain later. However, in order to maintain my strong position with the Dutch—which I may need to protect the Gerrymander Cash trade should more pieces roll in at the Javasche Bank than I anticipate—I must represent a power greater than that of a mere captain of a merchant ship. The Rajah here happens to be that power, Mr. Flint.

"It's as simple as this," Boll went on tersely. "He's at odds with the Dutch, which is one of his reasons for inviting me here, and which is why I came here."

The Rajah's habitual glare lost its impression of hostility again for an imperious smile. "And," Boll continued, "since he's playing at war to gain a few points from the Dutch, with no real desire for a war he

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would surely lose right now, I've put in my bid to serve as the Rajah of Mataram's peace negotiator."

I saw it all then. He was pretending acceptance of an offer for piracy in order to humour the Rajah. "If I could produce peace out of chaos at the right time, I could flood the Indies with cash pieces and receive the Dutch blessing as well."

The Rajah, impatient and nervous, paced the floor, then sat down. "When shall we expect your decision, Captain Boll?" he asked.

"As soon as I get through with Mr. Culver."

The Rajah, too, played deep in his own game. He raised his brows and said with an imperious gesture, "Of course, Captain Boll, we shall employ patience in awaiting your decision to head our pirates. But—it seems you need my immediate aid in another matter. Should I appoint you Mataram's official peace emissary, your position with the Dutch would be greatly improved."

Boll said, "Immensely."

"Then perhaps I should demand your quick acceptance of the rôle of Pulo Besar."

"I'm not ready for that," Boll said flatly.

"Then I find it necessary to demand some guarantee of your future acceptance, Captain." Boll said nothing; he was in no position to argue. The Rajah seemed his match and more as he said:

"The guarantee I demand is the dancing girl, Kim Kim."

THE Prime Minister entered again, bowed lower than before, as if trying to efface himself as much as possible. He advised that van Kleegermarq threatened to depart and return with force. The Rajah smirked, thinned his eyes, and nodded. In a short time a huge, big-boned, angry Dutchman was escorted to the throne. He clicked his heels and bowed with a jerk and stood still, awaiting the Rajah's order to proceed. The Rajah, however, kept His Majesty's emissary standing there for some time before asking: "What is your business?"

"This," snapped the Dutchman, extending a document. "It is from the Governor General." He unrolled the paper and began:

The Rajah of Mataram is in a position to render a great service to the whole of the Indië by surrendering an alien who . . .

As he read on, I sat up, alerted. The substance of the message was nothing short of a bid for Boll, whose "fabulous scheme" had been uncovered not two days after the Governor General exonerated him by letter in Batavia, in which the Dutch had annulled the charges in the Kim Kim affair and granted Boll permission to double his deposit guaranteeing the cash piece in the Javasche Bank of Batavia. The exposé had come about through the diligence of Dutch special agents, who had counted in the Moluccas, in the Celebes, and aboard more than thirty trading schooners a number of cash pieces which, if and when they found their way to the banks, would almost double the quantity guaranteed by Boll's deposit in the bank.

"Thus," van Kleegermarq announced as he scanned the paper,

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" the Dutch Colonial Government of the Indië is convinced that fraud, premeditated and wilful, was and is the motive behind the mysterious trade coin. Therefore, the full force of the law will be trained on the perpetrators of this fraud, namely : Kapitein Boll and the owners of the vessel, Culver and Adams of Boston.

" Attached is a warrant for seizure of any trade coins the vessel might be carrying as well as for the arrest of Kapitein Boll."

The Dutchman presented the papers to the Rajah and clicked his heels once more as I turned a probing eye slowly towards Boll.

He simply sat there, smiling and calm.

" You Dutch are most arrogant," the Rajah hissed, his fingers stroking the ribbon on his golden blouse in fastidious manner.

" *Ja !* " came the reply. " Diplomacy seems a useless art in these parts, Your Highness."

" I shall make a note of your worthy observation, mijnheer. But you desire this Captain Boll. How very odd, mijnheer, that we should be of the same mind."

He smiled, eyed Boll shrewdly, and called for his Prime Minister. With the arrival of the official, he proceeded to dictate :

He regretted his stand against the Dutch in this matter, and his reluctance in sending such reply to the worthy Governor General was matched by the genuine grief he experienced in a further indulgence of incompatibilities. However, he had only that day appointed the conquerer of the notorious Pulo Besar to the high office of Foreign Minister ; he had done this in salute to the Dutch Government, which had shown not only its own appreciation and gratitude, but that of the victimized sultans and rajahs of the Lesser Sunda Islands as well, when it honoured Captain Boll. Since the appointment of Captain Boll to such office had been considered by all a stroke of diplomatic genius, which could only convince the venerable Dutch Government of his desire for a lasting peace, he begged the just rulers to lend the matter further thought and advise him posthaste of a final decision.

He said at last, " List my titles, and the word *friend*. Write it up and return it here for my signature." Boll grinned.

In the interim of waiting, van Kleegermarq was invited to relax and join us at the table. He complied in hostile manner. Boll asked questions, at last drawing the Dutchman out.

" *Ja*, Kapitein Boll," he exulted, " regardless of this uncertain last-minute luck of yours, you are faced with ruin in the Indië."

" Last-minute luck, you say ? " Boll said easily. " I'm tempted to let you arrest me and prove the Dutch fools again." Thereupon he produced the letter signed by the Governor General and read a part of the last sentence : " '*—the Government will prosecute relentlessly when and if one item of your trade money above the posted guarantee is redeemed at the Javasche Bank.*' I can circulate millions of them without violating that, mijnheer." He did not add that this was the very secret of the cash.

The Government's man savoured his reply ; he leered as he said, " In Batavia, four schooner kapiteins whom we questioned about your cash-piece trade were told that they, too, might be indicted for fraud

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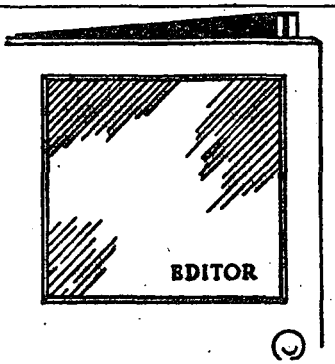

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if it was discovered that they had helped circulate a fraudulent coin. Would you be interested in knowing what they did? They rushed to the Javasche Bank and traded your worthless pieces for guilders. Nor is that all. The bank in Soerabaja predicts a run from the Celebes and Moluccas to exchange the coins for guilders. There is more.

"The rumour along the water front in Soerabaja is that your cash piece is doomed—not because of the arm of the law. *Neen.* But because you, Kapitein Boll, cannot sustain their value, because you have no more on hand!"

Boll chuckled. "Now that's odd. I've got plenty of them."

"And if you haven't, there will surely be a cash-piece panic. If you have plenty, our bank will be waiting patiently."

Boll considered the logic of the Dutchman's words, admitting with lifted brows the profound truth and threat which stared him in the face. It was true that our supply of cash pieces was running low. He realized the value of cash piece to save cash piece in the trade centres; he heard almost the sighs of relief and renewed confidence which one simple sight might invoke in Makassar, in Amboina, in many parts; and that sight was the *Gerrymander* working in for anchorage.

The Prime Minister entered and bowed. The Rajah accepted the written reply to the Governor General, read it, and examined the seal. Then, after asking the Dutch Minister to wait outside for a moment, he reached for the quill and inscribed his signature with a flourish typical of the man.

With that he got to his feet, smiled craftily, and said: "Captain Boll, I have shown my willingness to meet your every demand. You remember your own words, 'If I could produce peace out of chaos at the right time, I could flood the Indies with cash pieces and receive the Dutch blessing as well'? Under the threatening circumstances, I hold here more than you asked for. Much more."

He then held the instrument up with thumb and forefinger of each hand and very gently tore its edge. There was serious threat in the act, and it shone in his astute Hindu face as he said, "Now, Captain Boll, about the guarantee of your future decision."

Boll sat back and eyed the unyielding Rajah before asking: "Suppose my decision should be against playing the part of Pulo Besar?"

"Then you lose the dancing girl."

Boll considered this for long moments before reluctantly saying, "Very well."

His decision added to his string of titles and appellations a most exalted rank: Foreign Minister of Mataram. And he had traded Kim Kim for that. I said aloud: "The mighty Captain Boll!"

I STOOD alone at the pier watching Boll step up the gangway of the golden schooner. He had just delivered Kim Kim to the Rajah.

"You stay here and wait for Culver. And keep your eyes on the Rajah," he said to me. I detected, I thought, a sign of fatigue and the faintest stoop about his shoulders.

Soon the schooner's sails hauled aloft to snag a breeze, and Boll

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leaned against the after-rail as the schooner crept softly down the river.

I made my slow way up the terraced steps and sat beside a fountain. Harriet would be here soon. My mind went back to van Kleegermarq's threats of the night before. The Dutch had already struck one blow:

The Dutch schooner had pulled from the palace wharf ahead of us; and when Boll and I had reached the *Gerrymander* at dawn, we found the crew in a state of anger and excitement. The trouble? The men pointed to the Dutch schooner running fast into the strait beyond the reefs and cried, "The damned Dutchman! He did it!"

"What?" Boll asked.

The answer—it was tantamount to a mortal blow, and it staggered Boll somewhat—"The Dutchmen, sir, swarmed aboard. They searched the ship, and—sir, they left with the coining press!"

Boll asked, "And the box of cash pieces?"

"No sir. Chess outsmarted them. He stuffed the top of the box with sailcloth. It wasn't half filled with cash pieces."

I thought of the Dutchman's words: "The rumour along the water fronts is that your cash piece is doomed—because you, Kapitein Boll, have no more on hand."

He had spoken of a cash-piece panic. That I could readily understand: with more than a million cash pieces in circulation.

Boll, and only Boll, could avert panic. And he, as if in answer to the cries from distant trade centres, eyed the remaining cash pieces in the box and gave the order: "Make ready to sail."

The day turned from setting sun to twilight as I climbed the steps of the terraced gardens to the palace. I wondered what lay ahead, though not for long—there I came face to face with another act rising fast out of the curtain of the last one: Kim Kim.

SHE raced headlong towards me. Her flowered red silk covering stood out in the breeze behind her to expose her shapely limbs and breasts. She sobbed as if her very life ebbed from a wound, as if she raced in pursuit of its cause. I realized this was true. I could not imagine her a contented bird in the Rajah's rookery, nor could she. She threw herself at me, her eyes pleading. I held her close to me and stroked her hair as I frowned up at the palace. There had been reluctance in Boll's part in surrendering her, though she would not understand that, not Kim Kim, whose mind went only where her heart directed. All I could say was, "He'll be back, Kim Kim. He'll be back."

As I continued to hold her and look at the palace, something diverted my attention. There stood the Rajah, his face livid in anger and showing the red marks of her nails. I must have started, for she lifted her head and glanced behind her. In the next moment, she broke away from me and ran down the steps, taking them three or four at a time until she fell. Then she rolled and scrambled to her feet. At the river, she paused for a look behind her before glancing in both directions. I watched her until she rounded the bend towards the *Gerrymander* and Boll.

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WHY I was singled out to dine with the Rajah that evening I did not know; and he, with a further display of captiousness, took his time in hurdling all matters at hand with the thoroughness I had learned to respect.

As we ate spicy peppered foods and fruit, he asked a number of questions in perfunctory manner: what had Captain Boll done to gain the ill will of Mr. Culver; and how did Captain Boll manage to hold his seemingly servile position under the American shipowner? I answered his questions as briefly as possible, causing him a pretence of satisfaction at what surely whetted his appetite.

"Since there is little harmony between shipowner and captain," he said, "I am wondering if the captain has betrayed a trust there, if he would not use me to my disadvantage also." He paused, then said:

"Captain Boll arrived here basking in the sun of his own strong position. By a quick twist of fortune, he now rests in the palm of my hand." He lifted an upturned palm and stabbed it with a forefinger. "I can crush him by closing my hand, like this, or I can leave it open. If I follow the latter course, how long would my elusive friend the captain remain in my palm?"

"Are you talking about the future Pulo Besar?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied slowly.

"Why are you so anxious for Boll to head the pirates?"

"Because he is a pirate by nature. He can serve us well." He smiled craftily. "But would he? Can I trust Captain Boll, or is he the type of man who will repeat today's performance?"

So that was it. I mused before replying, "Boll made a great sacrifice today. I am sure he will return Kim Kim."

He smiled, his thin, energetic mouth and clever eyes accepting a hawklike expression as he said, "You will, of course, advise him to do just that, and soon. Otherwise—" He lifted his palm again and, under the threat of his smile, he closed it slowly.

I was the Rajah's guest in the weeks that followed. I met visiting sultans and rajahs, all bent on pleasure and further accession of wealth. I played checkers with the Rajah: it was his favourite game, and one in which he excelled. Before the *Gerrymander* returned, he said, "Some day, Mr. Flint, I shall present for your eyes a game of Mogul checkers. I seldom play checkers in such style without big stakes." I was unaware that a scheme was working in his head as he spoke.

I was roaming the palace grounds late one afternoon when I heard someone call my name. I looked towards the river and saw Chess. The *Gerrymander* had returned ahead of Culver. What, I wondered, was slowing the *Aladdin?*

Chess grinned, shook his curly head, and raced to where I stood. "Lord-a-mercy, am I glad to be back among civilized people!"

"What are you doing here?" I asked, scolding under my smile.

"Mr. Blue sent me to fetch you, sir. Captain Boll and Kim Kim left us. He's going on to Batavia."

I led him to a seat on the shady side of the palace. He was soon seated and answering the maze of questions I shot in rapid succession.

"Belay, sir, and I'll tell the whole damn story. In Soerabaja,

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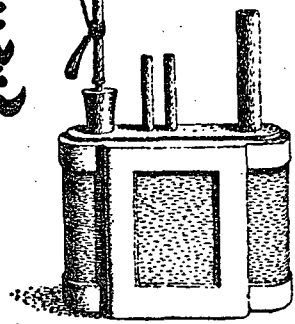

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Captain Boll ordered Lugo and me to follow him with satchels full of the coins. We did. He went to the *Big Coffin Saloon*."

I listened, tincturing a boy's observations with an adult eye as he told me all that happened . . .

SOERABAJA . . . Boll's entry into the packed saloon was tantamount to a sensation. Every eye followed him to the bar in a hush as silent as a wake. He broke the silence with, " Drinks for the house." The owner came up, shook hands reluctantly with, it seemed, a dead man vacationing from the monotony of a grave. There was an ominous quiet; it hung in tight layers, like the smoke; and Boll, feeling it, grinned, faced the crowd, and said: " I hear I'm licked." Silence, and he went on: " Well, there's later news. I'm not. I hear also that I have no more trade money." He then called to Chess and Lugo: " Spill your satchels on the floor."

The cash pieces shone under the lights like the gold they had once represented, and the calm eye of the Striker over the room seemed to insure their colour even then. Necks craned, and inane faces turned slowly to face inane faces. Not a sound was heard.

" The Dutch have spread the word that they have my coining press. So they have. But I've got cash pieces, and I'll not encounter much trouble in getting some Chinese metalworker to strike more." He lifted a drink without taking his eyes off the crowd.

" The Dutch say they can prosecute me for passing more of these cash pieces. But they can't. Why? Because the Dutch letter here states plainly that fraud exists when more than the guaranteed amount shows up at the banks for redemption. They won't show up." He chuckled. " Who wants them at a guilder each? " Boll asked. There was no response, and his cynical smile mocked the crowd. " Then who wants to redeem any at a guilder and ten? "

The vacillating audience found its speech, though in a low buzzing exchange of opinions. Soon one grizzled Dutch captain stepped forward with a hundred or two cash pieces, and Boll peeled off guilders from an impressive roll, saying so all could hear:

" I'm paying a ten per cent premium from now on. If any of you have rushed to the bank for even money, you're the loser—unless you get them back here by tomorrow noon." With that he paid for all drinks, ordered the cash pieces on the floor retrieved, and stalked out as if he were the soul and body of the Javasche Bank.

The next day he paid the premium on four thousand pieces; but before nightfall, he had sold nearly ten thousand pieces to the doubters of the night before. Confidence had been restored.

MAKASSAR'S harbour felt the *Gerrymander*'s hook in the early afternoon.

The harbour was crowded with native craft from Borneo, the spreading Celebes, and distant Moluccas; and the loaded boats had vomited forth thousands who had come to witness a public hanging where the Dutch thought it would do the most good. The doomed man was none other than Pulo Besar. His name was still magic; it

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carried the romantic ring of exploit under a whipping black flag. The Dutch were wary and touchy that day, since they expected an uprising. And the appearance of the notorious *Gerrymander* on that very day did nothing to dampen the fuse under a powder keg.

The marines rowed out and ordered no one to leave the ship, since the presence of Boll or any of his crew might infuriate the mob and thereby set off the spark. But Boll, haughty as ever, ordered Chess and Lugo to fill their satchels with cash pieces before lowering away a boat. The boat beached, drawing the guard, which Boll, with Kim Kim at his side, ignored as he advanced on the quiet crowd. They arrived at the *Pride of Makassar* without hearing a single threat from the myriad bearded faces under tarboosh and turban.

Once inside the place, van Kirsteen advanced, tugging at his handlebar moustache, very much perturbed at Boll's untimely visit.

"You picked a bad time to come here. There's a cash-piece panic, and all that's holding it off is the excitement of a hanging."

After more talk, Boll followed van Kirsteen to the crowded bar, where the owner asked for silence. Then Boll repeated with success the act he'd put on in the *Big Coffin Saloon* of Soerabaja.

On the following morning, Boll searched out an old Chinese metalworker. He showed the Gerrymander Cash and asked, "Can you duplicate this piece?" He could. The Chinese and Boll bargained for a long hour over the price.

"How long before they will be ready?" Boll asked. The reply, "Three weeks," evoked another argument. It ended with a promise on the part of the Chinese to deliver thirty thousand cash pieces—all that could be produced from the supply of metal Boll had—to van Kirsteen within two weeks.

Boll had no sooner boarded the *Gerrymander* that day than the Dutch officers of the gunboat came aboard with a search warrant.

They were hunting for Pulo Besar—they had hanged the wrong man on the night before!

AMBOINA . . . The ship had not ridden her anchor a full hour before the palm-lined beach was crowded with natives dancing up and down like a populace utterly berserk. Boll learned that the Chinese and Arabs had emulated the Dutch merchants by refusing to accept a single coin in trade. He forthwith ordered rum, silks, and gimcracks put ashore, and there, under the eyes of the merchants, he sold a big guilder's worth for every cash piece.

His genius in that case was deserving of praise: he looked ahead as he traded for every cash piece he could get into his hands. His next move was to advise the crowd that from that day on the Gerrymander Cash was worth a guilder and ten—but only at the stores of the merchants. The protest of the merchants was cut short when he posted American currency as a guarantee.

The Chinese and other merchants recognized Boll's excellent position in that moment: he actually had the power to regulate their flow of business and profits, since none could deny that the cash piece bought more goods from the native than the guilder.

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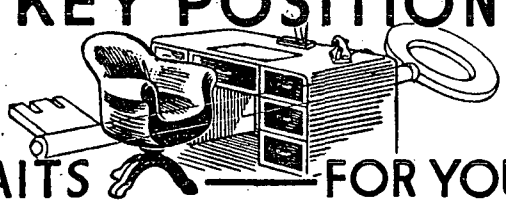

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"You'll pay a guilder ten for each one," Boll told them. "Which will make you think twice before letting the Dutch own them at a guilder each. And you'll take enough to scatter in remote spots, where they won't show up soon to start off another panic."

The ten biggest merchants came out of their huddle with a decision: they agreed to take five thousand each. Boll chuckled and sent Mr. Blue and Chess to the *Gerrymander* for the fifty thousand cash pieces. And, in doing so, Boll committed the greatest error of his career which, by revealing a true condition, struck at the very heart of the fabulous cash-piece bubble.

Boll, his mind dazzled by greed and power, had forgotten that the last box of cash pieces was almost empty. Chess and Mr. Blue returned with less than half the amount the merchants desired.

There was unmistakable triumph in the odious leer on one old Chinaman's face when Boll said he'd return in one month with the remainder; his old eyes seemed to say: "*So there is truth in the rumour that the honourable captain has little trade money left.*"

Boll stared for hours at a time during the hard, fast run back to Makassar at the big empty cash-piece box, upon which was printed in big black letters an apt word: EXPLOSIVES.

CHESS hadn't quite finished his story. "And that wasn't all, sir. We got back to Makassar in the night. We didn't wait for morning to run the shoals and reefs—we threaded them like a needle. Lugo, Mr. Wulsin, and I rowed the captain ashore; and we went with him to the Chinese metalworker's place. The old Chinaman appeared and said he had already delivered the cash pieces to van Kirsteen. Then we went to the *Pride of Makassar*.

"There we learned something that will make your eyes pop out of your head, sir. Aye, sir. By God and St. Ebenezer, it will!

"Van Kirsteen had boarded a Dutch gunboat only the day before—cash pieces and all—for Batavia!"

Thirty thousand cash pieces in the hands of the Dutch were nearly enough to ruin Boll.

Before I could say anything, Chess laughed and said, "And guess what we heard in Soerabaja on the return trip. The *Aladdin* had been there. Mr. Cott is her captain! And Miss Adams and Mr. Culver are aboard, sir."

★***And so Captain Boll, faced by the prospect of ruin on the one hand, and by the daring proposition of the Rajah of Mataram on the other, is soon to meet a new threat: the return of Robert Culver.***

And what of Kim Kim, in love with Boll, and pawn in his dangerous enterprise?

And Tom Flint, torn between his bargain with De Loach and his love for Harriet?

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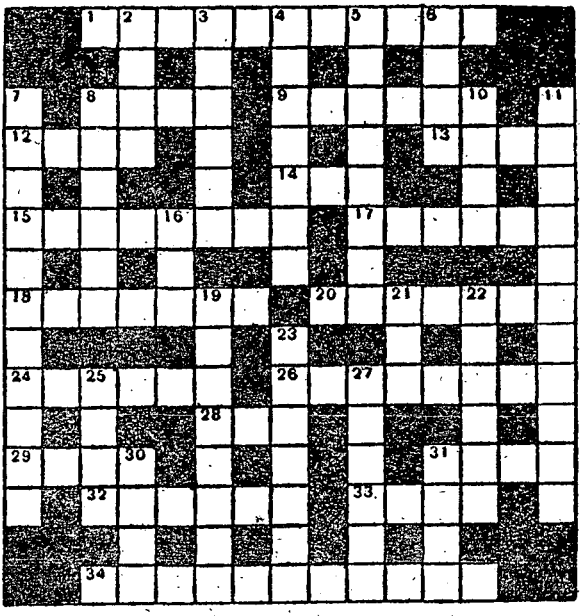
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 107



CLUES

Across

1 "The sweet —s, That grow for happy lovers" (*Tennyson*) (6-2-3)

8 Part of 1 across, perhaps (4).

9 The want of this little implement is at first plain (6).

12 Clearly every part of a tea chest (4).

13 It may hold the key to knowledge for many (4).

14 To give is this art (3).

15 "— the threat'ner and outface the brow of bragging horror" (*Shakespeare*) (8).

17 Often common to old-time travellers and parks of today! (6).

18 Include a couple finally (7).

20 Simple suggestion of absence of drawing power (7).

24 Man can hardly get socially lower than this (6)

26 Release a prisoner from his bonds, perhaps (8).

28 In a pie it's a villain, maybe with earrings (3).

29 Much may hang on this, even, perhaps, a battle (4).

31 Material to work upon (4).

32 This is got from a goat (6).

33 "— of the evening, beautiful —!" (*Lewis Carroll*) (4).

34 If one arrested his progress he would get an eye-opener (two words—5, 6).

Down

2 Cut short one's hate on either hand—and can one have a good word to say for it? (4).

3 A sprat to catch a mackerel (6).

4 Some hole in Cornwall perhaps (two words—3,4).

5 The thing to imitate (8).

6 "A little, round, fat, — man" (*James Thomson*) (4).

7 A game for lancers (11).

8 An artist hemmed in by overturned vehicles (6).

10 The right seat from which to make a bright daily start (4).

11 To go wrong in the test leads only into a trial in the end (11).

16 She wants a thousand to make a man and a thousand insects to make him stubborn (3).

19 The first part of this vehicle has largely displaced all of it (8).

21 Traditional at school and frequent in matches (3).

22 Inveigle a confused parent (6).

23 Will soon be too big for their boots (7).

25 One can this a vessel without flags or streamers (4).

27 Well preserved but out-of-date (6).

30 Multiply fifty by ten and the little girl will love it (4).

31 This swell would be a wash out if curtailed (4).

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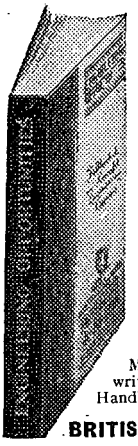

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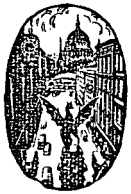

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